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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Education for All Summit
Of Nine High-Population Developing Countries

"Education for All:
Centrepiece of the New Revolution in Human Development"

New Delhi, India
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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Education for All Summit
of Nine High-Population Developing Countries

New Delhi - 16 December 1993

**"Education for All:
Centrepiece of the New Revolution in Human Development"**

This is an historic moment. Leaders and senior representatives of nine countries accounting for more than half of the world's population have gathered here today to help make Education for All (EFA) a reality. We in UNICEF are confident that this summit meeting will lead to an acceleration of efforts in each of your countries, and inspire an intensification of actions worldwide.

In the 1990s, we have witnessed the emergence of a new era of activism among world leaders in support of concerted efforts to meet basic human needs, and particularly for children. The year 1990 was a watershed year for children, beginning with Jomtien, then the coming in force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, then the World Summit for Children in September, and ending with achievement of the universal child immunization goals in December, the largest peacetime collaboration effort in world history.

The World Summit for Children, held in September 1990 with the participation of 71 heads of state or government, was history's first truly global summit meeting. Its Declaration and Plan of Action have since been subscribed to by the heads of state or government of over 150 countries, most recently by President De Klerk and Nelson Mandela in Stockholm. The Summit set more than 20 specific, measurable goals for the survival, protection and development of children to be achieved by the year 2000 -- and prominent among them were the goals of universal access to basic education for children and achievement of a primary education by at least 80 per cent of all children -- girls and boys. The Summit drew and strengthened the education goals from the landmark World Conference on Education for All held earlier in 1990 in Jomtien.

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The 1992 Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, incorporated in its Agenda 21 all of the year 2000 goals set by the World Summit for Children. Various regional forums of heads of state and government such as SAARC, OAU, the League of Arab States, the Ibero-American Summit, as well as such cross-regional bodies as the Non-aligned and Commonwealth Conferences and the G-15, have added their voices in endorsement of the ambitious but achievable agenda for children for the decade of the 1990s. As a result, more than a hundred countries have been re-examining their priorities and have been engaged in preparing and implementing national programmes of action for children. The World Summit for Social Development, scheduled to take place in 1995, will provide a major occasion for world leaders to review progress at mid-decade and look ahead. Education will also be a major topic at the World Conference on Population and Development next year and for the conference on women in 1995.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires States to provide each and every child with a basic education, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and came into force in 1990 after the necessary first 20 ratifications. It codifies, for the first time, the obligations of States toward the young and translates children's basic needs into rights, including making primary education compulsory and available free for all. The Convention has since been ratified by some 154 countries in record time, including all of the nine countries represented here today. By 1995, it may become the first human rights convention that has been universally ratified.

For the first time in history, children not only have their own "Bill of Rights", but the vast majority of nations and leaders are making long-term plans for the young, recognizing the inseparable link between the future of nations and the well-being of their children. The scope and vision of these plans represent, beyond all doubt, the beginning of a revolution in human development.

Education for all -- primary education for all girls and boys, basic learning opportunities for youth and adults, and a fair start in life for the young child with provisions for essential care and development -- is at the centre of the revolution in human development. Of all the manifestations of extreme poverty that assault children and youth, it is the denial of access to basic education that has the most far-reaching adverse consequences. It endangers the success and sustainability of efforts in all other aspects of human development and therefore mortgages the future of nations.

In spite of the gravity of the global crisis in basic education, there are ample reasons to be hopeful. Your countries have made very substantial progress in meeting your people's basic educational needs. At least six are now close to ensuring all of their children the opportunity by the year 2000 for completing a full cycle of primary education. Two more can achieve the year 2000 goal by a significantly increased effort, which I consider

likely. The ninth country will require a herculean but not impossible effort to reach the year 2000 goal. I myself have faith that these countries will make such an effort, and I am sure that the international community will provide full support if they do so. All nine countries have numerous examples of great creativity and of willingness to try new approaches. These innovations deserve to be emulated more widely both within your countries and on an international level.

In these days when realists are those who believe in the possibility of near miracles, such as we have seen with the breaking down of the Berlin wall, the end of apartheid, the recent PLO-Israeli agreement, to believe in Education For All by the year 2000 does not require a great leap of faith. Let me mention only a few examples from different regions of the world which give me reasons to be optimistic:

* In Bangladesh, Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia has taken personal charge of overseeing the implementation of the compulsory primary education programme. In this national programme, proven innovations by a large number of NGOs in non-formal primary education are an important complement to the government programme.

* In Egypt, under the guidance of President Mubarak, the education budget has been increased two-and-a-half times in three years, and a new community school model is being expanded to serve children in scattered, remote villages where formal schooling had not yet reached.

* In Mexico, a major organizational reform has been carried out to give local governments and communities a greater voice in managing local schools. President Salinas has put the whole government, at all levels, on alert by personally leading a periodic public monitoring of progress toward reaching social sector goals.

* In our host country India, the allocation for education has been tripled in the current 5-year plan and the share for elementary education has been increased to about half of the total.

Many examples can be cited in all of your countries to illustrate what national leaders can do to make the revolution in human development happen.

The children who should complete primary education by the year 2000 must be in school within the next two years. There is no time to waste.

I am aware of the ambitious national plans and programmes up to year 2000 as well as intermediate targets for 1995 and subsequent years that each country has adopted. The challenge now is to ensure that these targets are reached and progress made each year towards the goals you have set for the year 2000.

The Declaration and Framework for Action of this Summit provide for review and assessment of progress in children's enrolment in and completion of primary education and their learning achievement. Taking the cue from the dramatic success your countries have achieved and the process followed in universal child immunization, and the role national leaders are playing in respect of health goals in several countries, I propose three measures for your consideration in each country:

1. The President or the Prime Minister to review at least twice a year, at the beginning of the school year and in the middle, progress reports from all state/provincial governments on -
 - a) the proportion of entry-age children actually enrolled in and regularly attending school or an equivalent non-formal programme, and
 - b) the proportion of primary school age children completing a primary education and the rate by which drop-out, especially of girls, is decreasing.
 - c) assessment of actual learning achievement based on sampling, perhaps once a year in this case.
2. Simple sampling instruments should be developed by the end of 1994 in each country for assessing to what extent children acquire basic knowledge and skills that all children must acquire through primary education; this assessment to be applied on samples of those completing primary education.
3. The administrative heads of provinces, districts and local governments should take the same measures in their respective areas.

These steps for public accountability and social mobilization may make the difference between success and failure.

I do not underestimate the enormity of the task you have, the efforts you are making and the obstacles that the international environment places in your path for national development. I am also keenly conscious of the obligations of the wealthier countries of the world. They are anxious today about their current economic slow-down and structural unemployment, and some are contracting their ODA without a sense of the relative dimensions of poverty and deprivation among nations or of the indivisible nature of humanity and the common fate of the global village. I do, however, want to

stress that progress towards the EFA goals must be accelerated with both national and international resources, if we are not to fall farther behind in the struggle to narrow the rich-poor chasm in the global society.

On behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund and in the name of the world's children, I congratulate the nine leaders for undertaking this historic initiative. I also express our gratitude to the President of India, His Excellency Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma; His Excellency Mr. Narasimha Rao, the Prime Minister of India; and His Excellency Mr. Arjun Singh, the Minister of Human Resource Development of India, for their personal support and commitment and for taking the responsibility of hosting the EFA Summit.

Thank you for exercising global leadership in the new revolution in human development.