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Aase Liones's speech in the University Festival Hall, Oslo, on the occasion of the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 1965

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Aase Lionæs's speech in the University Festival Hall, Oslo, on the occasion of the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 1965

UNICEF

The death of Alfred Nobel at San Remo on 10 December 1896 robbed the world of a highly talented person. At the same time the world was enriched by a document, a testament, which has provided growth and stimulus to the ideals and the compelling desire for research that provided the guiding star in Alfred Nobel's rich but lonely life.

In his will Nobel directed that the interest on his fortune should be divided among those persons who have done the greatest services to mankind. On the subject of the Peace Prize he categorically states that it is to be awarded to the person who has done most to promote brotherhood among the nations.

Alfred Nobel, particularly in the later years of his life, was much pre-occupied with the problem of peace. This emerges inter alia from his correspondence with Bertha von Suttner, the author of the pacifist novel "Lay Down your Arms". Many people imbued with constructive ideas have, like Nobel, both before and after his time, devoted their attention to this apparently simple but as yet unsolved problem, that of promoting brotherhood among men and building a world free from war. During the course of time many profound theories have been developed to show how international relations should be organised in order to ensure the attainment of peace.

Personally, I have found no answer either in the works of the philosophers or in those of the legal experts. Maybe, after all, the only valid solution is to be found in the simple words our own poet Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson wrote as he lay on his deathbed in Paris in 1910. These words formed the first line of a poem which was never completed, but which begins as follows:

"Good deeds save the world."

We have come together here today to pay tribute, by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, to an organisation - UNICEF - because in giving life and meaning to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's words, it has fulfilled the condition of Nobel's will, the promotion of brotherhood among the nations.

UNICEF was set up by a United Nations resolution on 11 December 1946. The resolution was unanimous, but I well remember that in United Nations circles in New York that autumn we had a great many discussions with various politicians as to whether UNO really ought to organise a children's fund. United Nations, many of them maintained, was a political forum which was not justified in dealing with such "minor" peripheral problems as aid to children. During the war the organisation UNRRA had carried out large-scale humanitarian work for children, prisoners, and refugees in Europe and in China; for various reasons it was now being liquidated. A number of people expressed the opinion that, now that peace was a fact, in each country the national children's organisation should take over the work of caring for children.

Today there is no disagreement on the justification of UNICEF as part of the United Nations.

As you will know, it is not always easy to achieve unanimity in the United Nations. This is understandable, when one considers that we are dealing here with 118 member-states representing every race, nation, political ideology, and religious creed. But everyone has understood the language of UNICEF, and even the most reluctant person is bound to admit that in action UNICEF has proved that compassion knows no national boundaries. As soon as all the resolutions relative to the form of organisation, mandate, and financing of UNICEF were cut and dried, the organisation set to work.

It was a blessing to UNICEF and the millions of children it took to its heart that from the very first day of its existence it should have had a leader like Mr Maurice Pate. He was UNICEF's never-slumbering conscience. He never allowed formalities to impede him in his work; in his opinion the essential object was that good deeds should be carried out as swiftly and as effectively as possible. He recruited his fellow-workers from among those who were prepared uncompromisingly, to quote Bjørnson, to pursue "the policy of compassion". Maurice Pate

was the head of UNICEF for eighteen years, up to his death last year. He was an unassuming person, but on the road that leads to peace, and where politicians are still groping their way in the dark, Maurice Pate has lit many a candle.

UNICEF's first field of operations was in Europe.

What did Europe look like in 1946? And how were Europe's children living at the conclusion of a world war? The Swedish poet Hjalmar Gullberg provides an unforgettable picture of this in his poem "Europe's Children":

That we had fixed the padlock on our gate,
That hardly mattered;
Though fine-spun dreams had lulled the very soul,
Our peace of mind was shattered:
Beyond the palings Europe's children hold aloft
Their begging-bowl.

These were the children UNICEF came to help in Europe during that fearful, bitter winter of 1947 - undernourished, ill, clad in rags, homeless, and starved after five years of war and occupation. We came across them everywhere - in the ruins of cities, in refugee camps, in bombed villages in Hungary, Yugoslavia, Albania, Poland, Italy, Greece, Roumania, and Austria.

UNICEF itself calculated that in Europe in 1947 the figure of children in need amounted to 20 million. It was for these children in fourteen different countries that UNICEF provided a lifebelt, a stream of food, medicine, clothes, and footwear. Never have we witnessed an international relief campaign for children on such a scale. During the winter of 1947-48 UNICEF was able to report that it gave 6 million children and mothers one meal a day.

Fortunately the economic reconstruction of Europe after the war proceeded relatively quickly. After four or five years we were able to look after our children ourselves.

But no sooner did the European aid programme approach a point of solution than the outlines of another menacing phantom appeared, the inconceivable social misery of the developing countries.

As each of these countries solved its problem of national independence, the plight of their child population came more sharply into focus. In one single year, for instance 1960, we find 17 new states inscribed on the map of Africa. In a matter of a few years the membership of the United Nations rose from 51 states to 118. The majority of these new states are what we call developing countries.

Various factors, among them the modern mass media of communication - TV and broadcasting - with their dissemination of factual information on the social misery endured in these countries, made it a moral imperative for the wealthy nations of the West to come to the assistance of these countries.

The United Nations Economic & Social Council soon realised the extent of this task, and the efforts of its many specialist organisations, such as the World Health Organisation, FAO, and UNICEF, were directed to this work.

In 1946 UNICEF had been organised on the lines of a provisional emergency organisation. In 1953 the United Nations General Assembly decided to make UNICEF its permanent child-aid organisation, with the emphasis on work in the developing countries.

UNICEF now tackled the second great task in its history - the seemingly insuperable task of improving the indescribably miserable conditions in which hundreds of millions of children lived in the developing countries.

UNICEF is incapable of doing this work on its own. It can only work effectively in countries whose governments solicit its aid; and the countries receiving this aid are bound to make a contribution which is no less than that of UNICEF itself, in the carrying out of aid programmes. While the aid given by UNICEF generally consists of technical assistance, and goods, commodities, and equipment which must be purchased with foreign currency, the "receiving" country makes its contribution in the form of its own products, local personnel, transport services, etc. The interest in UNICEF's aid programme for children has been so great that the contribution of governments now comprises 2½ dollars for every UNICEF dollar that is given. In fact, the aim of UNICEF's work is precisely to provide a spur to self-help.

The aid that is given comprises all children in an area, without any distinction of race, creed, nationality, or political conviction.

At the head of UNICEF today we find a board consisting of representatives of thirty member-countries; it is this board that lays down the broad outlines of the work to be carried out, as well as evaluating requests for help and deciding the scope of such help. Today UNICEF's secretariat consists of some 600 persons, some of them working at the headquarters in New York, and some at the 30 regional offices in Europe, America, Asia, and Africa.

UNICEF is financed by gifts from governments, private individuals, and organisations. In 1964 118 countries contributed a total of 33 million dollars.

What does UNICEF accomplish with this money?

First of all it must be borne in mind that the field of work to be covered is enormous, embracing over 115 developing countries, with a total population of 750 million children, whose needs for better food, better health, and better teaching are far, far greater than the modest 200 million kroner now at the disposal of UNICEF. This sum corresponds approximately to the amount which is used in the world today every other hour for defence purposes.

However, let us not be dismayed at the thought of the still inadequate amounts of money available. The most important point is that for the first time in history we possess an international device capable of tackling the giant task of liberating the children of the development countries - who are all of them our joint responsibility - from ignorance, disease, malnutrition, and starvation. The most important thing is not the precise amount in terms of hard cash; what is far more important is the great step forward in the idea of international cooperation that UNICEF represents.

The English historian Arnold Toynbee writes that our century will probably not be remembered for its two world wars, but as the period in history when, for the first time, the idea of mutual help between people, with a view to raising the standard of living everywhere, was accepted.

Through its work UNICEF today is helping to make this picture of the twentieth century come true.

When UNICEF started working in the developing countries, the task appeared so overwhelming that it was difficult to know where to begin. To people aware of the tremendous advances made by medical science in the countries of the West, and the comprehensive health services enjoyed by the inhabitants of these countries, it seemed outrageous that hundreds of millions of children should be suffering from diseases which we today have means of combating. For this reason it was decided to give first priority to the campaign against such national scourges as malaria, trachoma, tuberculosis, and yaws.

Others pointed to the limitless extent of undernourishment and malnutrition, on the one hand, and the tremendous surplus stores of grain and meat in the countries of the West on the other hand. They would have preferred to concentrate on the campaign to raise the standard of nutrition.

A third group pointed to the necessity of overcoming illiteracy, since an ignorant population could not possibly achieve the economic growth that was needed.

Which of these courses did UNICEF choose?

It might be said that all three problems were tackled simultaneously, as it was realised that these evils - disease, starvation, and ignorance - form arcs of the same vicious circle.

If we consider the results that UNICEF has achieved today, it must be borne in mind that they have been achieved in fruitful cooperation with the World Health Organisation, with FAO, UNESCO, and the various technical aid organisations within the United Nations.

Cooperating with the World Health Organisation, UNICEF has made a sizeable contribution in the fight against malaria, a disease which in 1955 was reckoned to claim 200 million victims annually, of whom 2 million were mortally affected. By 1962 UNICEF had initiated anti-malaria campaigns in 34 different countries.

One of the best examples of the progress that has been achieved comes to us from Mexico, where UNICEF together with other UN organs was able to call on the services of 2,800 men who, on foot, on horseback, and in motor-boats, traversed the length and breadth of the country, disinfecting three million houses with DDT in the course of 1960 alone. Not a single death due to malaria was reported in 1960. Agricultural production, too, went up; and the government is now planning to move several million people from the central, overpopulated highland areas down to the areas now free from malaria along the coast.

In combating the painful and sinister disease yaws UNICEF has made a major contribution. In 1946 this scourge claimed a total of 50 million victims; while the disease is not fatal, it results in stunting and disfigurement of the human body. And yet this sickness, which brings so much misery to the individual, can be completely cured by a single shot of penicillin, at a cost of five kroner.

When Indonesia became independent in 1949, its government asked UNICEF to assist in the fight against yaws. It was calculated in 1950 that 10 million people in Indonesia suffered from this ailment. Together with the World Health Organisation UNICEF has succeeded in liberating whole villages from this scourge; and in a few years' time yaws will be completely eradicated in Indonesia.

We might mention the 10 million children who were treated for the tremendously infectious complaint of the eyes known as trachoma, or the treatment given to millions of lepers in as many as 35 countries. Mass examination of the population and anti-TB vaccinations have also been carried out on a massive scale.

In the prosperous parts of the world we are concerned with our nutrition problem. Many people are concerned because they eat too much, and worry about the ill-effects. In the developing countries, unfortunately, the problem is the very opposite. Experts calculate that in these countries half the population are undernourished or suffer from malnutrition. One of the results of this is that infant mortality is as high as 3400 per thousand, as compared with Norway, where the figure is 17 per 1000.

UNICEF has launched a number of projects in an endeavour to improve the feeding of mothers and children. This is carried out by information work in the close on 30 000 health centres for mothers and children that UNICEF has organised. It is also done by granting financial aid to the building of dairies, factories for the production of dried milk, and for the conservation of milk, or - as in Chile - by building a factory for the production of large quantities of fishmeal. The aim is primarily to encourage the production of foodstuffs rich in protein, such as fish, which can inter alia be bred on a large scale in fish farms, or in paddy fields under water.

UNICEF's initiative in these sectors is important because it represents the first systematic attempt ever carried out to coordinate scientific endeavours all over the world to produce food rich in protein for children in the developing countries.

I mentioned a third sector: the struggle against illiteracy, where UNICEF, in collaboration with UNESCO, has made a notable contribution.

If we review UNICEF's activities, we shall find that during these years it has carried out hundreds of aid schemes in developing countries within the health-nutrition-and-education sector.

Today UNICEF is about to embark on a third stage in its development.

interest

At the moment there is a tremendous/in most developing countries for the working out of nationwide schemes of economic planning. In the discussion revolving around these development plans, the primary matter of interest is how large investments can be placed in industry, agriculture, and communications. And yet, maybe these words of Nehru contain a dangerous truth: "In one way or another in all our thinking on development plans for factory plant and machinery, we lose sight of the fact that, in the last resort, development depends on the human factor."

It is this fundamental viewpoint that prompts UNICEF's efforts at the present time to ensure that the interests of the children are safeguarded in the development plans now being drawn up. UNICEF is here building on the principle of the

child's right to social security, education, and other rights, which were adopted by the United Nations in 1959 in their "Declaration on the Rights of the Child". And in the same way as we have seen the fundamental principles of the Declaration of Human Rights incorporated in the constitutions of many of the new countries, it is hoped that it will be possible to incorporate the rights of the child in the economic and social structure of these new states.

It is this hope that inspired the invitation that was sent out to attend the round-table conference in Italy, initiated by UNICEF in 1964. Those who took part in this conference were ministers, economists, and child-welfare experts. The conclusion arrived at was that, taking the long-term view, no economic development is possible unless the growth of a healthy and enlightened generation of children is given priority in the plans for development.

Maximum aid must be rendered by the prosperous countries if this gigantic task is to be solved; and we possess the material and technical potential for giving this aid. The miracles of technology seem to be limitless; we have within our grasp the possibility of satisfying practically every material need on earth. In fact, in our ambition we move beyond the confines of this world, literally stretching our arms towards the moon. On the other hand, there are millions of people who do not possess a spade for digging their meagre soil.

Today the people of the developing countries are fully alive to their own misery; and they are determined to leave it behind. They contemplate the riches of the West - our surplus food, our fantastic technology, the health and good things that we enjoy in life, all our material well-being, - they compare this with the misery of their own children.

This contrast creates a dangerous tension-factor, which threatens the peace of the world.

The aim of UNICEF is to spread a table, decked with all the good things that Nature provides, for all the children of the world. For this reason the organisation is a peace-factor of great importance. UNICEF has realised that children provide the key to the future; the children of today are the history of the future. UNICEF is now forging a link of solidarity between the rich and

the poor countries. In an age when so many people are terrified of the destructive effects of the forces that science has placed in our hands, UNICEF offers young people in all countries an alternative which it is worth living and working for - a world with

Freedom for all people.

Equality between all races.

Brotherhood among all men.
