

Chron Ref: CF/ANYH/0SEB/HST/1996-044  
File Sub: CF/HST/MEM/HEN-001/M

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Mr. Maurice Pate - In Memoriam



A statement by Miss Julia Henderson, Director of the Bureau of Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat to the Special meeting of the UNICEF Executive Board, 2 February 1965.

It is an honour and at the same time a moment of sorrow for me to add a few words of tribute for Maurice Pate on behalf of the Bureau of Social Affairs.

In light of the historical role played by the Social Commission in 1946 in establishing UNICEF as the major arm of the United Nations for the relief and rehabilitation of children in war-devastated areas of the world, it is not surprising that members of the Social Affairs staff, as well as many members of the Social Commission have felt a close bond with Mr. Pate for nearly eighteen years. They have applauded the pioneering work of the Organization and its Director and watched with intense interest the evolution of the Organization from a relief and rehabilitation agency to the solid, comprehensive organization it has become, devoted to the long-range needs of children.

In these few minutes this morning, however, I want to give my testimony to the qualities of mind and heart which Maurice Pate gave to this enterprise for children and, in particular, to UNICEF's work in child welfare and in national planning for children and youth. These qualities seemed to me to be characterized by his particular combination of pragmatism, simplicity, and warmth of human feeling.

It was indeed his pragmatism, which led him to guide this Organization's first steps in the path of single-minded attention to feeding and nursing back to health the millions of children who suffered the direct aftermath of World War II. It required neither long studies nor careful weighing of priorities for Maurice to understand, along with Dr. Rajchman and other members of the Executive Board, what had to come first. As the problems of Europe began to recede in the face of united efforts for rehabilitation and economic revival, Maurice turned his practical energies to the age-old problems of hunger and ill-health in the under-developed regions of the world. No official of the United Nations saw more clearly than Maurice the problems of children of these regions and translated these observations into practical action. In my own travels through Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, I have rarely found a village which did not have a monument in the form of milk station, a health centre, or a group of midwives testifying that "Maurice has been here." It was this same quality of pragmatism which led him to sense when

	UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label
	Ref0006C3E
Item # <b>CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1996-0090</b>	
ExR/Code: <b>CF/HST/MEM/HEN-001/M</b>	
Memoirs of Julia Henderson. Mr. Maurice Pate: In Memoriam	
Date Label Printed 5/15/2001	

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the Organization might broaden its activities to include welfare, education, vocational training of youth and in the end to see the importance of tying these activities together in a common national plan. Maurice would never have come to believe in the desirability of national planning for children and youth through economic models or doctrines about planning but only through a conviction that many countries would do more for their children and youth if they properly understood the relation of their investments in youth to their future as nations.

The quality of simplicity in Maurice Pate was in my view one of the most endearing and refreshing of all his characteristics. I am sure that all of you have felt relief as I have at the simple, uncomplicated way in which Maurice got to the heart of a problem - the way in which he was able to cut through bureaucratic terminology and procedures and to make a crooked way straight. I remember a day in 1956 when the Board had before it requests calling for help to environmental sanitation projects, fundamental education projects, community development - we had been working for more than 2 years in various inter-agency groups to clarify our concepts and approaches to community development and all that this idea implies. I asked Maurice whether he was able to tell the difference among the approaches taken by the international agencies under all these labels. He answered in his characteristic way, "Julia, the differences aren't important to me - all I know is that these projects will mean clean water and better chances for children in these villages to grow up as healthy, happy people."

The warmth of human feeling which never flagged in Maurice in all the years we have worked together may be illustrated in a thousand incidents and it is attested best by the host of friends he has left throughout the world. However, I should like to remember another conversation which I had with him as the Board was deciding to expand its activities in the field of child welfare services. I suspected that "social welfare" brought to Maurice's mind the image of a social worker giving tests to a child in a psychological clinic or giving relief checks to families in industrialized countries. To my surprise and pleasure, he immediately linked the idea with people he knew. He had just returned from Cuba where he had seen Elena Mederos Gonzalez at work and he spoke of her with much warmth as he said, "If this kind of person can be enlisted to help countries train child welfare workers, I think UNICEF should try it." He has given the kind of support in human terms which has caused our cooperation to grow and flourish.

I can only quote Helenka Pantaleoni in saying that "we shall not see the like of him very soon again. But the future of UNICEF is assured because Maurice Pate has given eighteen years of his life to nurturing this plant, to enriching the soil, to seeing that the roots are deep. We have more to do than sit in the shade of the tree, however - only as UNICEF takes its place in the total Development Programme of the United Nations will our obligation to Maurice Pate be met.