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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
Launching the \$102 Million UNICEF Appeal for Africa

1 April 1986



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The tidal wave of human suffering which engulfed most of Africa in 1984 and 1985 has receded across the continent. But the emergency is by no means over. At the height of the crisis, some 30-35 million people were affected in at least 20 sub-Saharan countries; many died from starvation and related causes and about 10 million people were displaced by the drought, abandoning their villages in search of food and water. The massive out-pouring of public sympathy resulting from the media's focus on this disaster triggered generous infusions of international assistance. This aid, as well as the serious efforts undertaken by many African Governments and individual communities themselves, has helped to save millions of lives. The United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA) estimates that some 3 million lives were saved.

UNICEF is grateful to the donor community for its generous support. Of the \$120 million requested by UNICEF in 1984-85 to meet non-food emergency needs in the areas of health, water relief and shelter, supplementary feeding and logistics, a total of \$76 million has been received. Although governments and inter-governmental organizations were the major contributors, it is heart-warming to note that about \$30.2 million (some 42 percent) was contributed by the public through UNICEF's National Committees, other Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and groups such as Band Aid/Live Aid and USA for Africa.

The crisis of the past few years in Africa was caused by a seriously declining economic situation exacerbated by vicious drought. In recent months the rains have come to sub-Saharan Africa, breaking the grip of the drought and bringing good - and in some cases, even excellent - harvests to many countries in the region. Together with the food assistance provided by the international community, this has led to an improvement in the food

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situation. Yet this recovery is deceptive. Even in countries which have experienced good harvests, there are large numbers of rural poor and displaced people who, for various reasons including the difficulties of transporting food from one area to another, are experiencing hunger and continue to face the spectre of famine. Although the media focus has shifted away, the phenomena of emaciated children continues to exist in pockets in some countries. Even where the match-stick limbs have filled out a little, the prolonged exposure to severe malnutrition has left large numbers of people weak and debilitated. In the midst of bumper harvests, hundreds of people continue to die every day because of health related causes.

The OEQA has removed from its list 4 of the 20 countries affected by the emergency in 1985. This is good news. However, the situation in several countries remains serious. An estimated 19 million people, mostly children and women, continue to suffer from widespread malnutrition, high infant and child mortality, food shortages, rising unemployment, the uprooting of families by large-scale population displacements and a serious decline in social services. Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sudan alone account for 11.6 million of the 19 million people. They also account for 85 per cent of the total unmet food and non-food emergency needs identified by the OEQA.

In Angola and Mozambique, severe emergency conditions continue to prevail, largely because of insurgent activities. In Ethiopia and Sudan, the emergency situation is the result of a number of factors, such as drought in localized areas, civil strife and large numbers of returnees and refugees. (Civil strife has interfered with the planting and harvesting of crops, preventing the proper distribution of relief aid and contributing to the destruction of existing social infrastructures.)

It is against this backdrop that the OEQA has appealed for some \$680 million in food and non-food emergency assistance to Africa for 1986. UNICEF is concerned with meeting the crucial non-food elements of this package, especially in the areas of health, water supply, supplementary feeding and relief survival items and this appeal is for \$102 million for 16 countries.

In 1986, donor response to the immediate food need of Africa has been generous. However, the equally crucial areas of non-food assistance have not received the magnitude of funding which was required. In famine situations, children die not only because they are deprived of adequate food but also because malnutrition enhances their vulnerability to disease. The experience of 1985 has proved once again the importance of a rapid response to health needs. Support to this sector is particularly urgent now because essential drugs and vaccines are needed to cope with outbreaks of disease which often follow the rains.

UNICEF appeals for more than \$100 million in assistance to Africa

Out of the total \$102 million UNICEF is appealing for this year, some \$26.4 million are to help meet urgent health needs in Africa. Programmes to

deliver accelerated support in such areas as immunization, diarrhoeal disease control, and the supply of basic drugs and health equipment have been prepared in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO). Although they are primarily emergency in nature, these programmes will help to strengthen and expand primary health care networks in the most seriously affected countries.

In the area of water supply and sanitation, UNICEF is requesting a total of \$26.7 million for emergency needs. Most of the projects presented to you in this appeal would service communities which are grossly underserved by both safe water supplies and sanitation. Lack of adequate water was a major cause of displacement of people in 1984 and 1985 and, together with inadequate sanitation, it was also a cause of many deaths both in the villages and in camps where people assembled.

For 1986, UNICEF has presented proposals for emergency nutrition and supplementary feeding programmes totalling \$12.1 million. These proposals, while continuing to focus on traditional support such as the provision of supplementary foods, cooking utensils, etc., also address the key issues of better food production and improved nutrition by supporting efforts which promote household food and economic security.

Relief and survival items - including plastic sheeting, clothes and kitchen utensils - and logistical support total \$37 million. During 1985, many severely affected people, including displaced persons, became totally destitute. In 1984 and 1985 UNICEF distributed more than two million blankets which were contributed as part of "people's campaigns" organized by the UNICEF National Committees in Belgium, Canada, the German Democratic Republic, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Economic Community. It is important that special assistance consisting mostly of clothing, blankets, tents, cooking utensils, soap etc. continue to be made available. The relief and survival needs of the displaced population could be expected to further increase especially if civil strife continues to intensify.

In developing its emergency interventions, UNICEF builds on its regular long-term development programmes in order to ensure that these interventions lead to lasting improvements. Inputs which would help to strengthen national capacity to identify and deal with problems affecting vulnerable groups are selected in order to ensure long-term benefits. In addition, UNICEF support provided to health and nutrition activities affecting children and women complements support from other agencies.

Some examples of many of these programmes are:

- In Mozambique (Changara), UNICEF is implementing a nutrition surveillance programme and organizing a children's nutritional status and food security situation information system.

- In the Niger, UNICEF has implemented off-season crop programmes aimed at improving the nutrition of children and family income by making food available to families, consequently helping to slow down rural exodus.
- In dried-meat projects in Ethiopia and Mali, UNICEF purchases cattle and uses the dried meat in distribution programmes at school canteens and feeding centres.
- In food-for-work, villages have been provided cereals in return for the construction of shallow wells and the clearing of land for vegetable gardens, as well as other community improvement programmes.
- At the height of the crisis in the Korem (Ethiopia) and other shelters, while there were no other sources of supplementary food, UNICEF provided protein-enriched biscuits to malnourished groups.
- Elsewhere in Ethiopia, UNICEF has supported cash assistance for the local production of a protein-enriched supplementary food. In the Sudan, in a similar programme, UNICEF helped establish a production unit for PRE-MIX (dried skim milk, wheat flour and sugar) which is distributed as a dried-food supplement for children.

The effects of Africa's economic crisis

13 of the 16 countries included in the UNICEF appeal are part of the overall OEOA appeal. The severe economic crisis which is affecting many African countries has led to a serious decline in social services gravely affecting women and children in some countries: UNICEF has therefore added Zambia, Ghana, Madagascar and Sao Tome to its emergency list.

While Zambia was on last year's list of drought-affected emergency countries, the rains have been good this year. However, economic deterioration caused by declining copper prices and increasing foreign debt has resulted in a decrease of the GNP per capita from US\$ 640 in 1982 to US\$ 254 in 1984. Figures for 1985 are expected to show a further dramatic decrease.

Ghana, Madagascar and Sao Tome have undergone equally severe and continuous drops in their GNP per capita: per capita income in Ghana has declined from US\$ 400 in 1981 to an estimated US\$ 210 in 1985 and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is up 25 per cent; in Madagascar per capita income has dropped from US\$ 320 in 1982 to US\$ 254 in 1984, with a further dramatic decrease expected once 1985 figures become available. Per capita income in Sao Tome has deteriorated from US\$ 490 in 1980 to US\$ 310 in 1983.

UNICEF interventions in these countries are aimed at stemming the continuing deterioration of existing social services and counteracting the effect of inflation and reduced family income through support for child survival measures.

The inclusion of these new countries is another clear indication of the deep-rooted and complex nature of the present crisis in Africa. The massive general poverty of Africa has been aggravated by economic decline, unbalanced agricultural development, and rampant population growth (at 2.7 per cent the highest in the developing world).

The prices of most African primary export commodities have taken a sharp fall from the relatively high levels of the mid-1970s. As a matter of fact, between 1980 and 1982 the World Bank stated that prices of non-oil primary commodities from Africa fell by 27 per cent in current dollar terms. This, combined with rising prices in the West, has meant that Africa's terms of trade have become even more adverse.

At the same time, in comparison with the 1974-1976 figures food production per capita dropped in the early 1980s by about 7 per cent. Consequently, food imports have risen. Not only does Africa have the lowest gross national product (GNP) per capita among the world's developing regions (US\$320), but there has been a negative growth rate of about -2.1 per cent annually from 1980 to 1983. Of the 40 African countries for which data is available, 35 have registered declines in per capita income from the peak years.

This severe economic crisis has had the effect of an emergency situation which has been exemplified by the declining investments in social welfare services contributing even further to the general poverty of Africa's poor.

The result is that Africa is the only region in the world where the absolute number of infant and child deaths has risen over the last two decades. Total infant deaths in Africa rose from 2.1 million in 1955 to 2.7 million in 1982. For 1983, the total of deaths among children under five years of age was 3.75 million. The drought has further amplified this grim statistic, so that about 5 million African children under five years of age may have perished in each of the past two years.

Even in 1986, a relatively normal year, we estimate that some 4 million children under five will die mainly through the lack of such basics as vaccines, oral rehydration salts, minimum supplies of antimalarials and such basic drugs as aspirin, penicillin, ampicillin, tetracycline and others.

Clearly, Africa will need sustained assistance. As I have stated earlier, the immediate symptoms of the emergency have receded to some extent in many of the most seriously affected countries. But the recovery is fragile and unless continued assistance is provided, the situation could lapse in many countries to the depths which were experienced in the past two years.

Ironically, the emergency has improved the chances of success for long-term development efforts. The massive infusion of assistance and the attention focussed on Africa have, in many cases, helped to generate new programmes of assistance which could form the basis for future development. UNICEF itself is now much better equipped to deal with the problems and its own infrastructures are in place. Total UNICEF programme expenditure in

Africa during 1985 increased by about 35 per cent over 1984, rising from \$78 million to \$106 million. From 1980 to 1985, UNICEF expenditure in Africa has doubled (compared with a 37 per cent increase in global programme expenditure, excluding major rehabilitation). In 1985, Africa absorbed 38 per cent of UNICEF's total global programme expenditures.

The urgent need to respond - rapidly and effectively - to the African emergency and to implement expanded programmes necessitated a major increase in the number and level of professional staff. UNICEF professional staff in Africa increased by 40 to 50 per cent. The limiting factor in Africa, therefore, is not UNICEF's capacity to deliver, but it could be the willingness and capacity of donors to support the programmes planned.

I therefore urge the donor community to support this UNICEF Appeal for \$102 million. If there is a lesson from the Sahel and Ethiopian famines of the early 1970s, it is that once the most immediate symbols of the crisis - the dead and the dying - recede from the visibility of our television screens, there is a natural impulse to withdraw, even though a little extra effort at this crucial stage could help to create a solid base which would prevent such major disasters from recurring. If donor support, generous as it has been in the past, is not maintained, much of the success of 1985 will very likely be eroded and the threat to millions of African children for whom the crisis continues and whose suffering has not been eased, will deepen.

Prospects of public support for Africa continue despite the fact that media attention has shifted to other issues. A new initiative launched by Band Aid and UNICEF called Sport Aid holds the promise of sustaining global public support for Africa. I urge governments, too, to continue to sustain their support. It would, indeed, be tragic if the successes of 1985 were to be negated by a recession of commitment in 1986.