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Closing Remarks by Mr. James Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
for the  
Action for Children: Unfinished Business  
The NGO Forum

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ACTION FOR CHILDREN  
UNFINISHED  
BUSINESS

PROCEEDINGS  
PROGRAMME

in conjunction with  
UNICEF Executive Board  
and  
The National Committees for UNICEF

United Nations, New York  
14-16 April 1986

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CLOSING REMARKS

by

JAMES P. GRANT  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNICEF

16/4/86

Thank you very much Mr. Chairman, Co-Chairmen. This has been a very welcome introduction to the policy discussion that is coming up tomorrow afternoon. This has been a very useful input from the voluntary organizations. I think there will be much more substance to our discussion tomorrow by virtue of what has happened today. As I see it, we are on the frontier of where UNICEF, as it evolves over the years, should be going next. Sometimes it is a question of advocacy; sometimes it is a question of money; sometimes it is a mixture of these. I would like to make several major points now.

The first is that a majority of the great social changes and changes in social policy have been brought about by the initiative of private organizations which then ultimately trigger governmental and intergovernmental action.

We were discussing slavery. The whole question of the abolition of slavery was a monumental example of a private initiative that ultimately lead to governmental action, and, in the case in this country, the great Civil War. The whole question of recognizing private suffering as a concern of government was relatively new. Dickens, one of the great writers, was an "agent provocateur" on this.

I can remember just ten years ago, before Alma Ata, when we were trying to make the case for primary health care. There were a number of case examples we were using for that public discussion and debate which included projects that had been sponsored by church groups in several parts of the world. The World Council of Churches had written them up nicely. It included projects like the Narringwold in the Punjab, which had a major private input to it. Where did the growth monitoring in GOBI-FFF come from? Well, I suppose the guilty party is here with us today. It was Dr. Morley and his colleagues who put this on the map through the PVO's. When we get to the whole question of oral rehydration therapy, it was a mixture not only of governmentally-supported institutions, but also of David Morley, who promoted the spoon that has since been widely used.

Now these were, in a sense, pioneering technological innovations. They were not, however, particularly dangerous social changes as such. Then there was breast-feeding. And in this case, it was the voluntary organizations that did the pioneering work in making the book on Cicely Williams, who was an advocate for this in the 30's, an acceptable topic for governmental action. WHO and UNICEF, I regret to say, would never have gotten into this but for the fact that the field was made an acceptable one for discussion.

And when one gets to family spacing, it is clearly groups like IPPF and the Population Council that laid the ground for major governmental action. In the question of nutrition and food supplementation, the work of INCAP and other groups of this sort has been key. And certainly, the question of female literacy is an area in which the churches in many parts of the world have been pioneers, and the governments have come in later. So, it is very clear that over a period of time, it is the private organizations which frequently do the innovating, and then it is the governmental or intergovernmental organizations which come in and interact. And really, this is what we are doing in the process of discussing the question of children in especially difficult circumstances.

The next major point that I would like to make is that UNICEF is much more of a people-related organization than many realize. Our international staff of professionals, around the world, number less than 500. We are a very small group. We are very dependent on not only working closely with governments -- which it is our primary task to support -- but also, when we do get an agreement with government, linking up with the private voluntary sector, who play a tremendous role. And then there is the ten days I spent in El Salvador, preparing for their national day of tranquility, the day when the war stopped while all the children were being immunized. Well, who were the allies there? Clearly, the Ministry of Health was out doing its job, with the Ministry of Education alike. But, frankly, it was the Church that has been the intermediary in making this possible. There were the ICRC and the Red Cross playing very active roles. Probably three-quarters of the TV, media and radio spots came from the private sector. So, UNICEF is clearly, very much interacting with these private organizations.

We have had some very good questions which will be good for the discussions yet to come. Ultimately, as on many of these issues that are here today, it is a question of priorities, and it is a question of timing. They are all genuine questions and important questions. Now, at what stage UNICEF should get into

them, and into what degree, and how, is the question that lies ahead.

I am pleased that there has been a broad overlap between the recommendations that have come forward to the Board and those that have been proposed here. There are obviously problems on what UNICEF can do. Clearly, we have dollar priority problems. You talk about a situation where the NGO's and UNICEF together spend a dollar per street child via a special fund. There is another proposal for a fund on exploitation. True, these are very modest sums, indeed, when compared to other budgets. But, when you realize the amount of discussion there was in 1985, when we spent three million dollars on oral rehydration therapy, one recognizes there is a money problem.

Clearly, there is also a management/time problem, particularly in the advocacy area. Where does one put one's management priorities? One of you raised the question of where you direct your influence and at what point, if you throw your influence behind certain topics, do you lose your ability to work in the country concerned? UNICEF, if I may put it this way, works on rather safe revolutionary issues. And this is really why we are so accepted everywhere. And issues that may not be "safe" this year, ten years later may be "safe", and then we can get into them without losing our ability to work on the broad front of issues for which we are responsible.

Those of you who read "Action for Children" will be aware of the first editorial that called on you to join the child survival revolution, saying that you can do a lot for children and that it won't get you into jail. Then there there was a letter to the Editor in the second publication that pointed out the number of people who had gone to jail for helping children. Well, there is a whole range of actions, and some of these may be appropriate for UNICEF at a particular time, and some may not, and this I would emphasize.

Then there is the whole question of the age group, although UNICEF clearly covers quite a spectrum there, as our involvement with street children demonstrates. UNICEF has been an active party in pioneering work with these children, while, at the same time, our financial involvement and our management time has been modest. The intervention on street children in Brazil, frankly, came at a time when hundreds of Brazilian communities recognized that they had a problem and were all trying to do something about it. The UNICEF participation -- and Peter Tacon is here somewhere -- was an illustration of an opportunity to do something about a problem when the time was right. There was a tremendous

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interchange of experience and sharing, and a lot of things began to happen. I suspect that if one had tried to push these programs ten years earlier, in 1971 or 1972, it would have taken much more effort to produce a fraction of the result.

I would conclude on the note that, ultimately, it is a question of priorities. UNICEF is a very small organization. It has a small staff. There are fewer people today in New York than there were two or three years ago. On the question of priorities, my own personal view is that priorities are relative. You do need to identify certain things to which one is going to give a high priority. At the same time, this doesn't mean that you are going to exclude everything else. One needs to leave a part of one's organizational resources, people, to work on the frontier areas. I would expect that, at the end of our discussions, the Board would authorize us getting deeper into some of these areas. But, they will be doing so, very conscious that UNICEF is a finite structure, and, in the final analysis, it is an intergovernmental body and, as an intergovernmental body, there are limitations as to what we can do -- regardless of the emotions of the people involved.

Thank you very much.