

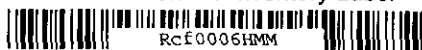
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Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
on the occasion of the
Launch of the Syrian Immunization Campaign

Damascus, Syria
13 September 1986



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Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
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Damascus, Syria - 13 September 1986

Your Excellency, Mr. Minister of Health,
Your Royal Highness, Prince Talal Ibn Abdul Aziz al Saud,
Regional Director, Dr. Hussein A. Gejairy,
Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:
Dear friends:

It gives me great pleasure to be with you on this proud and important occasion - the launching of Syria's national immunization campaign, which I believe to be the most important public health event in the world in the latter part of 1986. I am convinced that the launch of this campaign will lead to 6,000 young lives being saved from this year's immunizations, and to 100,000 young lives being saved over the next 20 years. This campaign is the Arab world's first nationwide effort to fully immunize all children against six major diseases in a short time. As such, it will lead the way in protecting Arab children and ending the terrible waste of some 400,000 Arab children who die each year from lack of immunization.

The goal of immunizing 1.2 million children during this calendar year is an ambitious one, but I believe you will meet it for a number of reasons. First, I am aware of the superb political commitment of His Excellency President Hafez al-Assad and other top political leaders of Syria. Second, the plan for the campaign which was first conceived some 9 months ago has been meticulously prepared and implemented. Third, I know of the tremendous creative energy that has been displayed by countless hundreds of committed and talented Syrians.

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This campaign will provide a model to the Arab world and to the world beyond the borders of the Arab nation. I believe that Syria has a great deal to be proud of, and I am sure that the visiting delegations from other Arab countries will be tremendously impressed by the progress you are achieving. I hope, of course, that they will in due course return to their countries having had a fire lit within them to equal your efforts!

I am tremendously impressed by the way that so many different Government Ministries, people's organizations and other bodies have co-operated to prepare this campaign. I am aware that nearly 10,000 young men and women are involved in directly motivating mothers and fathers to have their children immunized. I know that more than 740 vehicles have been loaned by a wide variety of organizations for use during the campaign. I know that more than 4,200 trained vaccinators are now deployed in the field, and will use 12 million doses of vaccine provided by UNICEF. The spreading of the word through Syria's 100,000 schoolteachers and through the dense network of mosques throughout the country is highly commendable. More than 80 per cent of the 1,561 vaccination centres are provided by organizations other than the Ministry of Health. The power of television has been effectively harnessed to promote the campaign, and the Ministry of Information deserves high credit and congratulations for the quality of the material produced and broadcast. That so many sectors have worked so well for so long is clearly a reflection of the excellent orchestration performed by His Excellency the Minister of Health.

When His Excellency, together with the Deputy Ministers of Planning, Information and Local Government, met me in Ankara a year ago on the occasion of the Turkish Immunization launching, I believed that Syria would, in its own turn, launch a well-planned campaign. It is clear to me now, however, that what Syria has done surpasses even the most optimistic forecast that could have been made a year ago.

It is most important to remind ourselves that this is the first day of the first round. There will be other rounds in October and November, and these take on a vital importance when we reflect that only the child vaccinated in each of these three rounds will be fully immunized. The mother and father whose child is vaccinated today or tomorrow must return with that child next month, and the month after.

In a larger sense, the stamina and purpose which will make parents return must also animate the campaign itself, so that the third round in November will be as dynamic as this first round we are inaugurating today, and so that next year and the following years the gains of this campaign in immunization will be sustained and consolidated; the general momentum it has generated will propel vital advances in other elements of primary health care and child survival. One of the main factors making these expected advances possible is the generous contributions anticipated from AGFUND, whose President, HRH Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz al Saud, has shown a keen and continuous personal interest in this campaign.

Through this campaign, Syria is demonstrating a revolutionary new approach to health care which relies on mass mobilization of the people and, in so doing, creates an awareness and knowledge for health improvement and an increased demand for existing services that greatly promotes cost-effectiveness. I am confident that this campaign will lead the way to similar campaigns in Syria next year for oral rehydration and, in subsequent years, for other important child health interventions. I am convinced that Syria will achieve all of this - and that in so doing, it will play a leading role and be a beacon for all countries in achieving Health for All by the Year 2000, and more specifically, universal child immunization by 1900, against the six diseases which have been taking the lives of 3.5 million children around the world each year.

We in UNICEF are proud to be associated with this splendid undertaking whose success in achieving over 80 per cent immunization by the end of November this year would be a most magnificent birthday gift to the children of the world on the eve of UNICEF's 40th anniversary on 11 December.