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Message on UNICEF History from Mr. James P. Grant
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for the
UNA-USA United Nations Day Concert & Dinner Programme
"Forty Years of Putting Children First"

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FORTY YEARS OF PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

In December 1946, the fledgling General Assembly of the United Nations created an agency to meet the needs of children, and the U.N.'s International Children's Emergency Fund was born. That children as a group were suddenly recognised as a priority was evident in the decision that the needs of children transcend politics and demand attention by nations acting together.

In the past 40 years dramatic advances have been made. In 1950, when UNICEF turned its attention from the children of war-devastated countries to those of the developing world, some 23 million of the 225 million infants and children in those countries were dying each year before their fifth birthday. Today that figure is 14 million of an approximate 480 million. The rate of needless death (and, in rough comparability, of disability) among these children has been cut from one in 10 to better than one in 30.

UNICEF now finds itself at the centre of an international community of interest, linking governments and people, North and South, in a common cause. Initially designed to supply limited humanitarian assistance, it evolved into a full-fledged actor in the global development struggle. This transition was reflected in dropping the word "Emergency" from the organization's name, when the General Assembly gave the United Nations Children's Fund its on-going mandate in 1952.

Years of down-to-earth experience and effective innovation in health, nutrition, water supply, education and support for women have since made UNICEF a respected and credible advocate for the place of children in the overall development process.

The fact that some 40,000 children under five still die each day, however, shows how much remains to be done. More importantly, the potential now exists to affect a veritable revolution in child survival and development capable of saving half of those lives. UNICEF is promoting a combination of low-cost, high-impact interventions such as immunization against the six major child-killing diseases and oral rehydration therapy, the remarkably simple sugar and salt solution used as a cure for life-threatening diarrhoeal dehydration. Either of these, if applied universally, could alone prevent 3.5 million young child deaths annually.

UNICEF has been an active partner in WHO's Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) since it was launched in 1974. That programme aims by 1990 to vaccinate all the world's children against the six killer diseases: measles, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and tuberculosis. When EPI began, those diseases killed an estimated 5 million children a year and disabled 5 million more. WHO estimates that 800,000 young child deaths were averted by immunization in 1985.

Oral rehydration therapy (ORT), the most cost-effective means of treating and preventing diarrhoeal dehydration in infants and young children, has been called by the British medical journal Lancet "potentially the most important medical advance of the century". UNICEF has helped numerous governments to develop programmes aimed at promoting the use of ORT, either in prepackaged form or through mixtures prepared in the home. It is estimated that the spread of oral rehydration averted some 500,000 young child deaths in 1985 alone.

Other readily available yet grossly underutilized methods that show comparable promise are described in UNICEF's annual publication, The State of the World's Children, and include the monitoring of children's growth with simple weight charts to warn of impending malnutrition, widespread return to the practice of breastfeeding, proper family spacing, promotion of female literacy, and ensuring that children receive adequate vitamin A and iodine, either in their diets or as supplements.

It is not these technologies alone, however, which make this historically unique progress possible, but the fact that, in recent years, largely as a by-product of the general development process, we have witnessed a complete transformation in our ability to communicate with the poor majority in developing countries. A revolution in social communications and organization has occurred, and the possible applications of this revolution for social benefit are only beginning to emerge. Today, virtually every village has a school, to the point that most young mothers in their 20s can read and write. With increased incomes, the ubiquitous radio is now in a majority of the world's homes. In most countries there is at least a television or two in every village, and frequently in many homes, with the result that people throughout a country can know what is going on and how to do things. Religious structures - whether Christian, Islamic or Buddhist - have a whole new capacity to communicate. And, perhaps to the surprise of those in the "developed" world, people in such less-developed areas as Africa, South Asia and north-east Brazil - while they still have per capita incomes lower than those of Europeans or North Americans of two centuries ago - now have a capacity to communicate not achieved in the industrialized world until only one or two generations ago.

The use of "social mobilization" has rapidly begun to bridge the gap between available medical knowledge and its actual use among the world's poor, making a Child Survival and Development Revolution a real - and challenging - possibility.

Meanwhile, UNICEF has lost none of its concern for development of the whole child. Traditional activities in non-health fields continue, and indeed the organization has stepped up advocacy for children in especially difficult circumstances: victims of armed conflicts, victims of exploitation, abuse and neglect, and street children.

In accepting the 1965 Nobel Peace Prize, UNICEF'S then Executive Director Henry R. Labouisse said: "The welfare of today's children is inseparably linked with the peace of tomorrow's world." In 1986, the International Year of Peace as well as the 40th anniversary of humankind's first global international initiative on behalf of children, these words have maintained the full measure of their significance.

From emergency relief to development assistance

From 1947 through 1950, UNICEF channelled some \$87 million in assistance to 13 war-devastated European countries "without discrimination because of race, creed, nationality, status or political belief." The organization gained valuable experience in supply operations, an integral part of UNICEF's work ever since.

UNICEF's move toward developmental work addressing the "silent emergencies" of hunger, disease and the lack of essential services in developing countries was initiated in 1948 as the UNICEF Board asked Executive Director Maurice Pate to prepare a study on the continuing needs of children

in many parts of the world as a basis for long-term programmes in child nutrition, health and welfare. In 1953, UNICEF's mandate was "globalized" and extended indefinitely. Within two years, UNICEF was assisting projects in 92 countries and territories; today, UNICEF's direct assistance reaches 120 countries.

Prevention and control of mass diseases affecting children was identified early as a glaring need. The organization participated in a massive anti-tuberculosis campaign launched in 1948; in south-east Asia, a highly successful effort against yaws, particularly in Indonesia, was followed by special campaigns against leprosy, trachoma and malaria.

Apart from such campaigns, UNICEF's priorities in the early 1950s were to build maternal and child welfare services, train child care personnel, improve child nutrition and, increasingly, to stimulate a concern for environmental sanitation. UNICEF began to emphasize integrating the often-isolated maternal and child health services with basic health systems.

The broader approach resulted in a higher priority for the role of education in general. Initially, UNICEF assistance to education was oriented toward improving children's knowledge about good health and sound nutrition, gradually expanding to include pre- and primary schools as well as teacher training. Increasingly, however, UNICEF turned its attention to channels beyond the classroom to reach the millions of children, especially girls, who never went to school or who dropped out too soon. Better educated mothers are

one of the best ways to improve the condition of children. UNICEF began to advise and help fund youth clubs, radio stations, women's groups, credit unions and co-operative societies to open new channels for non-formal education.

UNICEF also stepped up its assistance to income-generating activities for women and endeavoured to shift the focus of these programmes from traditional activities to small enterprises and improved access to credit.

In 1959, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child which stipulated that every child has the right to food, shelter, recreation, adequate medical care, free education and protection against exploitation. The General Assembly further stated that UNICEF assistance was one practical way of helping to achieve the Declaration's objectives.

Country problems; country solutions

The organization became increasingly convinced that the needs of children have to be addressed as a whole, so that UNICEF's various efforts could reinforce one another, and that all assistance must be specifically tailored to the needs, resources and culture of each country. UNICEF began to advocate that the needs of children be taken into account in national development plans. The organization gradually established close working relationships with countries where it was active, helping them assess the

needs of their children and set the priorities on which to concentrate. Children were beginning to constitute one of the criteria of national development.

Responsibility for executing programmes was placed on governments themselves. UNICEF's country approach led to decentralization of programme decision-making authority, within broad policy guidelines, to UNICEF field offices. Today, some 83 per cent of UNICEF's staff are in the field, working from 150 regional, country, and sub-country offices.

The emergency role

The principle of non-discriminatory assistance laid down by the General Assembly has guided UNICEF's work since its beginnings in Europe and since its role during fighting in China in the late 1940s, when UNICEF managed to aid children on both sides. Having gained a reputation for efficient, non-partisan work in the difficult negotiations of the Biafra war, in the final years of war on the Indochina Peninsula, in Lebanon and Uganda, UNICEF has been able to contribute significantly to relief and reconstruction efforts.

In 1979, this record and the mandate to help children wherever they are in need irrespective of the status of their controlling authorities led to UNICEF's role as the UN's "lead agency" in relief operations in Kampuchea, the largest and most comprehensive operation of this kind ever mounted.

The organization has recently been a major actor in the international response to the emergency situation in Africa, first helping to initiate and then co-operating in the massive effort coordinated by the UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, which UNICEF proposed. Fourteen field offices were upgraded to the rank of country office and the number of UNICEF professional staff posted in the continent jumped from 213 in January 1984 to 349 a year later. Africa last year absorbed 38 per cent of the organization's total programme expenditures. UNICEF also issued an analysis of the current crisis under the title Within Human Reach: a future for Africa's children, in which it argued that the neglect of the "human dimension" was a major cause of Africa's present problems and that solutions depended on enhancing the capacity of Africa's people to contribute to the development of the continent.

Towards community-based services and Primary Health Care

The country approach adopted in the 1960s expanded UNICEF's traditional collaboration. With a very broad mandate and relatively meager resources to work with, it became increasingly clear that more innovative and economic methods to reach unserved population groups were needed. The organization's use of public and political advocacy as a programme tool began to grow in importance. In 1976 UNICEF adopted a new programme philosophy which it called the "basic services" or "community-based services" strategy.

This approach promotes major involvement of local communities in essential services and in their own development. Community-based services

found direct application in primary health care (PHC), a concept jointly promoted by UNICEF and WHO. PHC's key element is the establishment of a system of health protection and care which begins with decisive responsibility at the local community level. Health workers are chosen locally to deal with common ailments and promote common sense prevention of illness. Properly trained, supported and supervised, these health workers are able to diagnose and treat 80 per cent of children's ailments.

Although most developing countries still devote at least three quarters of their health budget to expensive hospital- and doctor-based care benefiting less than 20 per cent of the population, virtually all developing nations have adopted primary health care as official policy - and many are making significant progress in shifting their priorities.

Self-reliant community health services have become vitally important in the 1980s as economic difficulties cut health care budgets in many countries. Extensive analysis of a survey undertaken by UNICEF (published in 1984 as The Impact of World Recession on Children) underscored the organization's advocacy of economic adjustment policies that treat human consequences of adjustment as an essential concern. It was revealed that during the early 1980s, after decades of improvement, malnutrition levels and infant mortality rates were actually increasing in developing countries such as Ghana, Botswana, Malawi, Kenya and several Latin American nations. Adjustment policies were found to have a greatly disproportionate impact on the poorest segments of a society, and even within those poor segments, the most vulnerable groups (i.e. women,

children and the aged) were found to bear the greatest share of suffering. UNICEF advocates alternative forms of adjustment policy that require the meeting of basic human needs, and that ensure maximum human well-being, given the constrained and usually reduced resources available.

To ignore the human dimension of adjustment is an economic error of the most fundamental sort. To fail to protect young children at the critical stages of their growth and development, for instance, is to wreak lasting damage on a whole generation, the results of which will have effects on economic development and welfare for decades ahead.

A unique people-to-people partnership

The first National Committee for UNICEF was established in the United States in 1947. The 34 Committees now active, mostly in industrialized countries, help generate a better understanding not only of UNICEF's work but of the needs of children in developing nations. Their fund-raising and advocacy work is bolstered by the travelling and volunteer appearances of UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors from the entertainment and sporting world.

UNICEF also works closely with a myriad of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Several national and international NGOs have become essential components and supporters of child survival efforts through programmes, fund-raising and advocacy. The importance of NGOs to programmes

benefiting children is rapidly increasing - at national and local levels - due to their emphasis on people's participation in self-reliant services. In some cases, governments request they carry out portions of UNICEF sponsored programmes.

40 years: a beginning

The United Nations Children's Fund now celebrates 40 years of efforts which have improved the health and living conditions of millions of the world's children and laid some of the groundwork for a more promising future. But the challenges ahead remain formidable. Child malnutrition has risen substantially since the beginning of the decade as a result of drought, war and civil strife; economic difficulties threaten the advances made in previous decades, reducing expenditures for health, education, drinking water, sanitation and housing.

In that threatening context, the low-cost interventions and self-reliant, community-based approach advocated by UNICEF become even more relevant and urgent. UNICEF's purpose therefore remains essentially what it was when the world created its agency for children: as Executive Director James Grant says, "to demonstrate what can be done, and to spur the world on to do it".

Text of Box 1

Governing UNICEF

UNICEF has a semi-autonomous status in the UN system, with its own governing body, the Executive Board, and a secretariat. The Board is comprised of 41 members, elected on the basis of annual rotation for three-year terms by the Economic and Social Council. The membership includes nine African members, nine Asian, six Latin American, four East European, and twelve West European and other States. The 41st seat rotates among the regional groups. The Board holds one regular session every year to establish policies, review programmes and approve the budget. The Executive Director is appointed in consultation with the Board by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Text of Box 2

UNICEF's finances

UNICEF is entirely dependent on voluntary contributions. Its total income for 1985 was \$375 million, including \$41 million in contributions for emergencies. Contributions from governments are the main source of income, but approximately one quarter of the organization's revenue comes from popular support, notably through the fund-raising efforts of National Committees and volunteers, and the sales of greeting cards.

UNICEF's sectors of activity in 1985 were: basic health (30%), water supply (21%), planning and project support (14%), emergency relief (13%), formal and non-formal education (11%), nutrition (6%) and social services for children (5%). Eighty-three per cent of all UNICEF staff were posted in field locations last year.

Text of Box 3

The people-to-people agency of the United Nations

UNICEF's capacity to address the needs of children and support multilateral approaches to world problems has always been strengthened by its popularity with the public and the moral and financial support it derives from private citizens.

The Kampuchea crisis in 1979-81 and the African emergency beginning in 1984 triggered unprecedented public responses of support - for UNICEF and for all organizations working in these areas - as well as demand that governments take action.

While most often it takes a disaster to prompt a major public outpouring, UNICEF has recently concentrated its outreach efforts toward marshalling public support for positive opportunities. In February 1986, UNICEF joined in partnership with Bob Geldof's Band Aid organization to sponsor "Sport Aid" to call attention to the continuing developmental needs of Africa beyond famine relief and to prompt the world's governments to seriously address those needs at the United Nations General Assembly's special session on Africa in late May. Through the innovative efforts of UNICEF's global network of field offices, National Committees and NGO allies, on May 25th (the eve of the General Assembly session), Sport Aid's "Race Against Time" became the largest simultaneous worldwide political demonstration ever mobilized - involving over 20 million people in organized activities in hundreds (if not thousands) of cities and towns in over 78 countries on six continents. The

world took note, and a pragmatic action programme for Africa's economic development was adopted by consensus in the General Assembly. Many leaders of the negotiations attributed this success to the worldwide spotlight focussed by Sport Aid, as millions of people spoke with their feet. At an organizing cost to UNICEF of approximately \$1 million, Sport Aid has today produced a net financial return of nearly \$25 million, with contributions still arriving.

To further advance worldwide understanding of the potential of the Child Survival and Development Revolution and to draw attention to the successes being achieved in development projects, UNICEF in July joined as global partner in the "First Earth Run" - the principal public commemoration of 1986 as the International Year of Peace. On September 16th, the opening day of the 41st session of the General Assembly, Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar lit a torch at United Nations headquarters, and sent it on a globe-circling route through dozens of countries on all continents. The torch is being received by national leaders and passed among common citizens; its light is illuminating effective developmental projects in communities along its route, and its message is one of hope and demand: "Give the world a chance - children need peace!" Having begun the first days of its journey from New York through Hartford, Providence, Boston and Portland and on into Canada, the torch will return to the United States in December through Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington (10 December), Wilmington, Philadelphia, and Trenton. On December 11, 1986 - UNICEF's 40th anniversary - the torch will return to the United Nations to light a permanent peace flame and launch worldwide celebrations of citizen commitment to building a more peaceful, healthier world for our children.
