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Comments by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
on the
"Public Face" of UNICEF House

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JPG comments on the "public face" of UNICEF House

I was in Washington last week, and passed an old apartment building which for several decades had been used as offices by scores of "low-rent" organizations and agencies, and I was reminded that that building, in some little commandeered apartment, with files kept in the bathtub, had been UNICEF's first Headquarters.

Fortunately, the era of bathtub filing passed quickly, and UNICEF took up residence in the U.N. Secretariat building when it was completed. And then, in the mid-1960s, as the U.N. grew larger, we were evicted, and rented a some space in the commercial building at 866 U.N. Plaza. "Some" space became much space, and eventually the better part of three floors in a building with the largest per-floor floorspace in Manhattan.

But for 40 years, the "people-to-people" organization of the United Nations system - the agency so dependent upon and so vitalized by the public - had homes which had no room for people. Our headquarters was always just offices in a building, and never a place for "the people" to feel a part of UNICEF.

That is now very changed. Not only do we have a marvelously more efficient, better organized, more comfortable place to work - even if we still

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can't always count on the elevators to work. But we also have a "people face". We have a distinguished, impressive, architecturally praised but low-key, non-ostentatious building - which efficiently and comfortably allocates less space per person than the U.N. standard across the Plaza in the Secretariat and across the street in 1 and 2 U.N. Plaza. And we have a home that people can visit:

- to learn, by touring through the exhibition;
- to support UNICEF, by purchasing greeting cards and other products in the gift shop; or
- by participating in conferences, meetings, seminars, lectures, roundtables, film showings, etc., in our Labouisse Hall downstairs.

Finally, UNICEF has a home that matches our people-to-people face. Or, I should say, will soon have such a home. Like all construction, our exhibition isn't quite finished. It's close, but a few of the donated components for it - like the carpet and some of the video equipment - are still just arriving.

I should explain where this exhibition came from. From the very beginning of our plans for UNICEF House, we had planned to have a public exhibition space, and reserved the first floor for that purpose. But I'm not sure we had any real idea of what to put in it. This was one of those things for which UNICEF acted on gut instinct, rather than established fact. We're accused of that often; sometimes it's true! But usually, something comes through that justifies our faith, and I think this is definitely one of those cases.

In June 1986, Danny Kaye and I went to Vancouver for "UNICEF Day" at the EXPO world's fair. And we discovered the United Nations pavillion.....

<your own recollections of the pavillion,
and how you came to think of it for U-House>

It's particularly fitting that it was Danny Kaye who discovered the exhibition with me, because Danny truly created and pioneered the "people face" of UNICEF. And so it's very appropriate that we plan to name this public facility in UNICEF House - the exhibition space and the gift shop - as THE DANNY KAYE VISITORS CENTRE.

Let me now introduce Theresa Bowers, of our Greeting Card Operation whom we asked to manage the Visitors Centre, to explain the exhibit to you, and then you're all welcome to walk through it. And you won't need construction helmets!

Terry....