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Message from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the Children of the World
through
Global Co-operation for a Better World

23 April 1988



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Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

To the Children of the World

through

Global Co-operation for a Better World

[23 April 1988]

You, as young people in the 1980s, have the chance to participate in something extremely important which has never been done before - something which will not merely earn a page in history, but will change history entirely, and for the better. It is an opportunity which did not even exist until very recently, and frankly, no generation yet has been able to achieve it.

One of the greatest challenges facing the world today is presented by the tragic fact that, still in 1988, 38,000 children die each day and a comparable number are crippled for life. If this many children were dying from causes which we could not do much about, we would excuse this grim reality as tragic and regrettable. In the past, child deaths on this scale have been regarded as acceptable for this reason. Today, however, it is simply no longer the case that there is not much we can do about it. In our time, advances in knowledge, and in the social organization to put that knowledge to use, have rendered such an excuse obsolete. Now we can prevent these deaths - through remarkably simple and low-cost means.

As a dramatic demonstration of this new potential in the 1980s, the lives of millions of children - reaching 2 million in 1987 alone - have been saved, and the crippplings of millions more prevented, by people and nations who have mobilized to put today's low-cost solutions in the hands of poor families for whom they can make the life-or-death difference. And it is noteworthy that organizations of young people - Scouts, for example, and children organized through schools and religious groups - have played a critical role in such aspects of the programmes responsible for this unprecedented accomplishment as raising funds, volunteering to help in immunization campaigns, and perhaps most importantly, in spreading the word.

Yet while the means are now proven, hundreds of millions of families remain unreached by this potential for a virtual revolution in child survival and development - a breakthrough which, by the year 2000, could reduce child death rates by half over the final two decades of this century, save more than 100 million children from death and disablement, improve the health and nutrition of many hundreds of millions more, and slow population growth as well.

When nearly 40,000 children die every day for largely avoidable reasons, then it becomes not only tragic, but unconscionable.

In any civilization, morality must march with capacity. Today this means that the mass deaths of children must be placed alongside slavery, racism and apartheid on the shelf reserved for those things which are simply no longer acceptable to humankind.

Reducing child death rates worldwide by half in such a short period of time has never, in the past, been reasonably possible. Today we know it can be done. But it can be done if - and only if - people the world over take a dynamically active role and make it happen.

You can:

- find out more about this potential for a "Child Survival and Development Revolution" (CSDR);
- make it the topic of discussions and the focus of action in groups to which you belong;
- raise funds and awareness;
- write letters and articles for publications which you read; and
- volunteer in a variety of self-help health activities.

I urge you to seize the challenge and make this unique possibility a reality - for all the children - and the future - of the world.