

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1989-0005

Address by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to the  
81<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Budapest, Hungary  
13 March 1989



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



**Item # CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1998-02130**

**ExR/Code: CF/EXD/SP/1989-0005**

81st Conference of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPO). Address  
*Date Label Printed* 18-Jan-2002

cover + 12pp + 06



United Nations Children's Fund Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia  
Детскому фонду Объединенных Наций 联合国儿童基金会 منظمة الأمم المتحدة للأطفال

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Mr. Chairman,  
Secretary-General Cornillon,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am very pleased to participate in these deliberations on the "protection of the rights of children", and particularly on the proposed Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It may be helpful to take a look, right at the outset of these discussions, at the basic question: Why a Convention now? Why have this Conference and other eminent gatherings devoted so much high-level time and concern to formulating a draft Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to promoting its adoption and ratification?

Is there any significant reason why now, in 1989, we should arrive at the moment in history at which a new charter for children should establish global norms regarding the rights of children and the responsibilities of nations to ensure the protection of those rights?

Indeed, you take up this issue at a crucial moment - an era which might be described, for children, as the worst of times and, potentially, the best of times.

We all know why they are the worst of times. Economic crises, including recession and external debt, have so haemorrhaged Latin America and Africa, in particular, that average incomes have fallen by 10 to 25 per cent in the 1980s. In the poorest nations, spending per head on health has been reduced by 50 per cent, and on education by 25 per cent. It is, of course, the most

vulnerable within these nations - especially children and women - who bear the greatest portion of the burden. In fact, UNICEF has estimated that at least half a million young children died last year alone as a consequence of the slowing down or reversal of progress in the developing world resulting from the debt burden.

And yet, activities are afoot throughout the world which make these potentially the best of times for children, as well. One indication of this is the historically new support for children's issues at high political levels. Specifics regarding the survival, protection and development of children have, within the last two and a half years, been the focus of debate, declarations, resolutions and joint support from such fora as the Summit of the seven South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries (three times, now), the Summit of Organization for African Unity (OAU) countries (twice), and the Summit of the seven Central American countries. The single social issue mentioned in the joint statement of the May-June 1988 Moscow Summit between the U.S. and USSR was the current survival breakthroughs for children.

Many of you may be aware of the landmark legislation in Peru, supported by every political party in the country, requiring the reduction of infant mortality by at least 15 points before the end of 1990. Furthermore, the new constitution of Brazil, by incorporating all provisions of the draft United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, will be remembered as a pioneering example of bringing a new and higher ethic regarding children into national law.

Such activities are very compatible with the final stages in reaching international consensus on a Convention on the Rights of the Child. The draft Convention, first proposed by Poland in 1979, has progressed to the point at which - with your strong support - it might well be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly this fall, and the necessary ratification by the first 20 countries could take place before another year has passed.

In fact, so much is possible to save the lives and improve the well-being of children, and children's issues are moving so forcefully to center stage, that we are even seeing the phenomenon of heads of state and government calling for and encouraging a "World Summit for Children". We have heard such eminent figures as President Mugabe of Zimbabwe, who is also, of course, the current chairman of the Non-Aligned countries (NAM); Prime Minister Carlsson of Sweden; and Presidents Soeharto of Indonesia, Ershad of Bangladesh, Traore of Mali, who is also Chairman of the OAU, and Alfonsin of Argentina voice strong support for such a proposal.

What is happening?

We are all aware that, all-too-often, when circumstances become difficult, it is the most vulnerable - such as women and children - who bear the greatest burden. Yet these signs give us hope that something is shifting - that we are willing to put children's issues higher on the agenda.

It is shifting partly as a by-product of the development progress since World War II. The communications revolution of recent decades has opened the door to unprecedented potential to save the lives and improve the well-being of children on two mutually reinforcing fronts.

First, it is the new capacity to communicate with the world's poor that makes it possible today to reach those previously unreached with readily available low-cost/high-impact health knowledge and technology capable of preventing the vast majority of young child deaths. In fact, the potential is so great that leading health experts (in such fora as the meeting of the Task Force for Child Survival<sup>1</sup> and the WHO-UNICEF Joint Committee on Health Policy<sup>2</sup>) have agreed that it is feasible, by the end of this century, to halve 1980 child mortality rates. If this is accomplished - and it is clearly do-able - the lives of some 100 million young children will be saved as a result, and comparable numbers will be saved from lives of crippling disabilities due to the side effects of childhood diseases. Furthermore, the same activities which are known to produce such results contribute to slowing population growth rates, as parents become confident that the children they do have will live.

It is our new capacity to communicate to poor families - our new ability to get basic health messages across and empower families with life-saving health knowledge - which makes broadscale impact of available health knowledge and inexpensive technology truly feasible.

But the communications revolution is tipping the scale of possibilities in children's favour on a second front. Not only can poor people learn about life-saving knowledge and technologies, but the affluent worlds are now well aware of what is going on among the poor as well. Thus, it is well known that 40,000 children still die each day, the vast majority of them from causes for which we have long-since discovered low-cost cures and preventions.

If these children were dying from causes which we could do little to prevent, or if we did not know that this was happening, the situation would be tragic, indeed. But 10,000 children are dying each day for lack of 50 cents worth of vaccine in each. And another 10,000 are dying each day from the dehydration associated with diarrhoeal diseases, even though a simple sugar and salt solution - oral rehydration salts (ORS) - costing 10 cents to prepare and administer at home, could save these children. For these vulnerable lives to continue to be snuffed out in this way with our full cognizance - is not only tragic; it is obscene. Morality marches with capacity, and ethics with awareness.

What is happening with the new high-level attention to children's issues is indicative of a sea-change in our collective responsiveness to the particular needs of children. A broad-based movement is at work in all parts of the world to ensure that what is do-able on behalf of children gets done. What we sometimes refer to as a "Grand Alliance for Children" is growing, comprised of non-governmental organizations, government agencies, groups of parliamentarians (including notably the IPU), religious and professional groups and more.

A new morality and new ethics are emerging which assert that we have a responsibility toward all children, and toward the future. As an integral part of our moving toward a more just and humane world, this new ethos says it is unconscionable not to act to save children's lives and improve their well-being when we clearly have the capacity to do so much, for so many, and for so little cost. Surely it is time for preventable child deaths on the massive scale which still persists to be put on the shelf alongside racism, colonialism, and discrimination against women - i.e., among those conditions which are simply no longer acceptable to humankind.

It is only natural that children, who may be the weakest and most vulnerable, but for most families are the most precious, to be given a higher standard of human rights protection than adults by society.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the future of all countries depends on the quality of their human resources, the shaping of which begins really even before a child is born.

In the efforts to turn today's unprecedented possibilities regarding children into realities, what can we do?

First and foremost, we can support the adoption of the Convention this fall, and vigorously support its ratification immediately afterwards. But when I say, "What can we do?" with regard to the Convention, I am speaking figuratively, or rhetorically. I am really saying: What can you do? For you are the political men and women, you are the law-makers who can act to see that the Rights of the Child becomes law. We can only exhort you to go back to your own countries and work to make sure that children do come to have the protection and special care the new Convention will provide them.

Here is what we believe you can do.

First, you can each make clear in your own nation that this is not a partisan document. It is for all parties, for all peoples. It is for the children, and the children have no politics. It is a non-partisan convention that brings us all together. Don't let anyone bring politics into it. For once we have something in the world with which we can all agree. Helping children - ensuring their well-being - is something with which no one can take issue.

The first step is to make certain that this Convention is adopted by the UN General Assembly. Use your influence to get it adopted.

The next stage, of course, is to see that it is ratified. In this arena, yours is the crucial role. For the Convention can only be ratified by each Government after it has reviewed its national laws relating to children and modified them to be consistent with the Convention's provisions.

The global community looks to you - the law-makers - to take the lead in this. Right now, as soon as you return home, you can ensure that action is initiated or accelerated to revise your nation's laws to bring them into accord with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In addition to action on the Convention, there will be other opportunities to demonstrate solidarity on behalf of children over the next two years. Each of you enjoys a privileged position in your country and in your community. Are you willing to use your station to further children's issues?

- Your advocacy will be especially needed in the immediate future to achieve the U.N. goal of universal immunization by 1990 - through which so much dramatic improvement in the well-being of children is possible for so little.
- In your own countries, support issues that address children's concerns.
- Your encouragement of a possible World Summit for Children will clearly make it more likely that the whole world will join together in a massive new commitment to the well-being of children.
- Set your focus on the 1990s as a decade of "development with a human face", and particularly with a child's face.

I urge you to examine the major needs of children in your country and to explore the most effective means of meeting them. Consensus is gathering that the physical solutions to the main problems are well within reach - and at affordable costs, both financially and politically. What is required at this crucial juncture for children is that leaders such as yourselves marshal the political will, vision and leadership to make the solutions realities.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

I had intended to close my statement here. But I have just returned from an emergency mission in the Sudan on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and I am convinced that action by this Conference would contribute to saving 100,000 lives in that country, the great majority of them children, this year.

Mr. Chairman:

May I, therefore, raise briefly one additional related matter before this Inter-Parliamentary Conference: Article 38 of the draft Convention, on children in armed conflicts, states that all parties to the Convention shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict. I came the day before yesterday from the Sudan, in which 250,000 civilians - a majority of them young children - died in the past 12 months as a consequence of the armed conflict between the Government and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Southern Sudan. I am distributing a Khartoum news story with pictures to each delegation. Another 100,000 to 150,000 are likely to die in the year ahead if some 100,000 tons of food and other relief supplies are not distributed in southern Sudan between now and mid-May when the advent of heavy rains will bring air and road transport to a halt. Present delivery of supplies is only a small fraction - a trickle - of the supplies needed.

To avoid another disaster bound to take such a heavy toll of life - the equivalent of 4 or more Armenian earthquakes - the UN Secretary-General proposed to the Government of the Sudan that the UN and the Government jointly sponsor a high level international conference on this emergency in southern Sudan.

This meeting, which I co-chaired on behalf of the Secretary-General, took place in Khartoum on March 8-9 with the endorsement of the Chairman of the OAU, President Traoré of Mali, but without participation by the SPLA, due to the meeting's location in Khartoum. A plan of action was reached to ship 175,000 tons of supplies - two third before the advent of the rains in mid-May - for the relief of 2,200,000 southern Sudanese. More than two thirds of the necessary funding is already in hand. What is needed, however, is a month of tranquility in April so that supplies can move in safe-passage. The Government has agreed in principle. The SPLA, which has publicly supported the need for a special relief effort, is currently considering the proposal for a month of tranquility. Prospects range from, at the most, an area-wide ceasefire throughout southern Sudan, to, at the least, an arrangement for "bubbles of tranquility" around each major shipment of relief supplies. A decision and firm agreement is needed in the next two weeks.

A resolution from an interparliamentary meeting of this eminence and distinction urging both parties to suspend their conflict sufficiently to enable a massive shipment of supplies from northern Sudan and from the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Zaire, before the advent of the rainy season in May would be most timely and would increase the likelihood of an agreement which could save the lives of more than 100,000, - a great majority of them children. Both parties feel the pressure of world public opinion, which has just begun, within the past three months, to recognize the scale of the largely needless tragedy that has occurred since last May. The United Nations could assure the transmission of such a useful resolution to the leaders of both groups within a matter of days after your enactment of it.

#### Footnotes

- 1/ The international Task Force on Child Survival (often referred to as the "Bellagio Group") is sponsored by UNICEF, the World Bank, UNDP, WHO and the Rockefeller Foundation. In March 1988 at Talloires, France, the Task Force gathered a dozen health ministers and health secretaries from the largest developing countries of the world (Brazil, China, Colombia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan); heads of major international organizations such as Barber Conable of the World Bank, Halfdan Mahler of WHO, and James Grant of UNICEF; plus major bilateral aid agency administrators such as Margaret Catley-Carlson of CIDA (Canada), Carl Tham of SIDA (Sweden), and Alan Woods of USAID; and private leadership from the Rockefeller Foundation and Rotary International.
- 2/ The Joint Committee on Health Policy (JCHP) consists of members of the Executive Boards of the WHO and UNICEF. The JCHP has guided international health policy for children for 40 years.



81st INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE  
Budapest, 13-18 March 1989

Conference  
Item 5

CONF/81/5-DR.25  
17 March 1989

PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Draft resolution unanimously adopted by the Committee on Parliamentary, Juridical and Human Rights Questions and the Committee on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Questions

Rapporteur: Mrs. M. Mitchell (Canada)

I.

The 81st Inter-Parliamentary Conference,

Background

Noting that 30 years have passed since the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and ten years since the proclamation of the International Year of the Child,

Recalling that the need to extend special care to the child is stated in the 1924 Geneva Declaration and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations in 1959, and that this need is recognized by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,

Underlining the commendable efforts and achievements of the United Nations in promoting and protecting the rights of children, as well as the irreplaceable role of UNICEF and the work of non-governmental organizations in safeguarding the lives and well-being of children throughout the world,

Noting the consistent work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in improving the well-being of children and protecting their rights, reflected by the resolutions and recommendations adopted by various IPU Conferences and specialized meetings held in different parts of the world since 1931,

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Expressing satisfaction that the second reading of the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child submitted to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has been completed, and that the draft is being considered by the United Nations Economic and Social Council with a resolution that it be adopted by the UN General Assembly at its 44th session,



Convinced that the draft International Convention on the Rights of the Child, as an achievement of the United Nations in setting legally binding standards in the field of human rights, represents a positive contribution to the protection of the rights of children and of their well-being,

The situation of children

Stressing, however, that children have special needs during their physical and mental development and therefore require special care, protection and their own rights,

Convinced that the family plays a fundamental role in the education and development of the child,

Appalled that more than 40,000 children, primarily in developing countries, continue to die each day from common childhood diseases which can be prevented,

Deeply concerned that millions of children live in conditions of extreme poverty, suffer from malnutrition, hunger, illness, maltreatment and environmental pollution, and lack social provision for their physical and mental development,

Further concerned that children are also victims of war, are refugees or homeless, that they suffer as a result of apartheid or racial or other discrimination or of colonial or foreign domination, that they are subject to neglect, physical abuse, abduction, illegal trafficking or drug abuse, or are exploited for the purposes of labour, prostitution or pornography,

Also concerned at the potential threat to children posed by recent technological developments, particularly in the field of biological and genetic engineering, and by uncontrolled access to many kinds of electronic transmissions,

The economic factor

Realizing that the total debt of the developing world is over one trillion dollars and that the most onerous effects of such debt are borne by children, and aware that since 1979, arms imports by developing countries have added 15 per cent annually to their growing debt, diverting scarce resources which could have been spent on child welfare,

Noting that the situation of children in developing countries is worsening owing to sharp cuts in health and education spending made in the context of structural adjustment programmes designed to cope with the growing debt burden,

Emphasizing that the rights of children should be protected in all circumstances, regardless of ethnic background, nationality, race or religion,

Implementation of the Convention

1. Welcomes the many precise, concrete provisions in the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child which concern children's rights to protection and services and to participate in social life, and their right to their own life;
2. Stresses the importance of the measures provided for in the draft Convention to examine progress made by States parties in fulfilling their obligations, in particular, the importance of the future Committee on the Rights of the Child;
3. Calls on the Parliaments of all States to urge their respective Governments to accede to this Convention and to ratify it as soon as possible after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly at its 44th session;
4. Asks each Parliament and Government to make the necessary changes to national legislation to align it with the provisions of the Convention, it being understood that this process cannot lead to a restriction of any more favourable rights which may exist in each State;
5. Recommends that each State adopt information policies aimed at making both children and adults aware of the measures taken to promote children's rights and of progress made in the achievement of those rights;

Action of Parliaments

6. Strongly urges parliamentarians the world over to propose new legislation in fields such as taxation, social security, labour, housing, health care, working hours, parental leave, education and services, that will enable parents to ensure that their children enjoy the best possible conditions for their psychological, physical, intellectual, and emotional development;
7. Also strongly urges Parliaments to consider the means by which they can most effectively monitor and contribute to the implementation of children's rights in their own countries by establishing ombuds institutions for children;
8. Calls on all Parliaments, governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, religious and community groups, and society as a whole to join in a grand alliance for the defence and protection of children's rights;
9. Calls on Parliaments to present initiatives to strengthen families and to promote family stability:
  - (a) Particularly to ensure the protection of the most under-privileged families by improving their living conditions;
  - (b) By supporting parental education programmes in health, nutrition and family planning; and

- (c) By providing programmes in family planning, immunization and primary health care, making them known and ensuring economic and geographical access to them;
10. Calls on all States to minimize the deleterious effects of technology on children by instituting adequate controls and safeguards;
  11. Also calls on Parliaments to improve the draft Convention so that minors, including children under the age of 18, shall be neither recruited into combatant armed forces nor recruited to take part in hostilities, and stresses that the protection accorded by the Convention should be at least equivalent to that accorded by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977;
  12. Strongly urges Heads of State and Government to convene a summit meeting on children's problems, set concrete goals and take positive action to protect the children of today who will make up the world of tomorrow;
  13. Urges Governments and international organizations to ensure that in the implementation of development programmes, priority is given to the well-being of children;
  14. Strongly denounces violations of the rights of children which result from armed conflict, undemocratic or racist policies and foreign occupation, and urges all Governments to contribute to the protection of the rights of children who are oppressed by the inhuman policy of apartheid, who live in occupied territories or who are refugees;

Economic considerations

15. Stresses that the rights of children can best be advanced and guaranteed through concerted efforts by the whole international community to establish a just international economic order and to settle conflicts and remove hotbeds of tension by means of dialogue and negotiations, so that the precarious situation of children in developing countries may be redressed;
16. Appeals to the industrialized nations and to international monetary Authorities to provide debt relief to third world debtor nations and increase assistance to them so that they can release more resources to fund children's programmes;
17. Urges all Governments to support disarmament measures and to use the funds released to secure the economic and social development of children the world over, especially in developing countries;

Special concerns

18. Urges all States to guarantee that children are protected against exploitation in the work force in accordance with international labour Conventions and Article 32 of the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child;

19. Calls on all Parliaments to ensure that girls are given equal opportunities with boys in all spheres of society, in particular in education, health care, food and equal remuneration for work;
20. Recognizes the right of children belonging to national or ethnic minorities to enjoy their own culture and receive instruction in their mother tongue;
21. Calls on Parliaments to take appropriate measures to strengthen international co-operation for the protection of children's rights in the area of custody, support and visitation where appropriate, and to enable adopted children to maintain contact with their native language, culture and heritage;
22. Urges Parliaments to review national law and practice, as they concern juveniles, to ensure compatibility with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice. (the "Beijing Rules"), adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 40/33 of 29 November 1985, and to support present efforts to adopt guidelines on delinquency prevention (the "Riyadh Rules") and Standard Minimum Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty;
23. Calls on donor countries to increase their voluntary contributions to the Special Programme for Sub-Saharan African Countries Affected by Drought and Desertification of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which has made it possible to improve significantly the quality of nutrition of the most vulnerable population groups concerned, thereby reducing infant mortality, also calls on donor countries to increase their contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) and requests all parties concerned to facilitate the mission of UNWRA.

II

Special urgency in Sudan

The 81st Inter-Parliamentary Conference,

Noting in particular the situation in Sudan where 250,000 civilians, the great majority of them children, have died in the past year as a result of armed conflict and where at least 100,000 people face the prospect of certain death this year unless massive relief supplies are delivered before the rainy season begins in May,

Strongly urges the warring parties in Sudan and the international community to seek without delay a peaceful solution to the conflict and at least assure a month of tranquility to enable the shipment of necessary relief supplies to reach the affected areas in southern Sudan before the May rains bring internal transportation to a halt.