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Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Opening of the 1989 Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York
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UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1989 session

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I join our Chairperson in extending greetings and a warm welcome to the members of the Executive Board and observers, the representatives of UNICEF National Committees and non-governmental organizations, and other friends and colleagues.

I also wish to express particularly warm regards for our Chairperson, who has continued and expanded upon the tradition of visits to the field for first-hand exposure to UNICEF programmes and discussions with government leaders. In October 1988, she visited the Côte d'Ivoire and Benin to see the Bamako Initiative first hand. This past February, she spent a week in El

Salvador and Nicaragua. She also participated actively in the informal UNICEF consultation on the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child which was held in Geneva last November. The following month she extended a visit of her own to Paris by two days to further strengthen UNICEF's long-standing relations with France and French support for strategies for children. Most recently she participated in the Paris Round Table, "Today's Children = Tomorrow's World", where she chaired a portion of the meeting. She has been most generous with her time in most ably chairing three Bureau meetings in New York, which also enabled her to attend an informal Board/Secretariat consultation on Africa. It has been a pleasure and an opportunity to work with her.

And, of course, I must express my very deep appreciation to the Members of the Executive Board who, through the Chairperson's consultations, affirmed their support for my stewardship of this wondrous organization and endorsed the Secretary-General's proposal to reappoint me for a third term in this office. I thank all of you for your confidence, as I thank the Secretary-General for his. I will do my best.

Children in a global context

Madam Chairperson, in Part I of my Report to the Executive Board [E/ICEF/1989/2], I contrast the enormous unmet needs of the world's children with the extraordinary opportunities which we now have to address those needs, derived largely from the unprecedented progress which has been made over the past decade and the foundation which has been laid for continuing accelerated advancement over the decade ahead...the final decade of this century and millenium. How UNICEF can best contribute in the years immediately ahead to closing this gap between unmet need and extraordinary opportunity is a central challenge to this Executive Board.

I particularly cite four distinct developments of the past year which can make us optimistic about reaching the ambitious goals of child survival and development (CSD) in the 1990s if there is the necessary political will to achieve them. These included:

- the positive changes in international relations, with the cold war and regional conflicts giving way to peace and reconciliation, and a heightened effectiveness of the United Nations system;
- the growing support of world leaders, collectively and individually, to commit themselves to CSD actions as manifested in recent regional and bilateral summits of Heads of State and Government in South Asia, Africa, the Arab States, Central America, and between the USA and USSR;
- the success to-date in country action on universal child immunization (UCI) and oral rehydration therapy (ORT), already saving the lives of 7,000 children daily and which could increase to 12-14,000 daily within two years, and the continuing advances in the knowledge and techniques of other simple, low-cost solutions to many of the major problems facing children, including social mobilization on a massive scale; and

-- the rapidly developing consensus on a United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These improvements in the world scene and in attention and action for children make it now conceivable, perhaps for the first time in history, that concerted action by nations could not only greatly reduce but virtually eradicate - at low cost - some of the most fatal and debilitating diseases which so devastate the children of the world. Indeed, the WHO-UNICEF Joint Committee on Health Policy, whose report the Board will consider and is reflected in our paper on Strategies for Children in the 1990s, proposes a series of health and environmental goals for children which could realistically be achieved within the decade, saving the lives of more than 100 million children by the end of this century and protecting a comparable number from crippling disabilities. Over time, such reductions in child death rates can be expected to lead to even greater reductions in births as parents gain new confidence, particularly through these means in which they participate, that their first-born will survive.

The tool for change for children

As the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Hiroshi Nakajima, declared at the World Conference on Health Education in Houston last August:

"We must recognize that most of the world's major health problems and premature deaths are preventable through changes in human behaviour and at low cost. We have the know-how and technology but they have to be transformed into effective action at the community level. Parents and families, properly supported, could save two-thirds of the 14 million children who die every year."

It has become particularly apparent that UNICEF, along with our many partners and allies among governments, international organizations, UNICEF National Committees, NGOs and institutions, have been working with one of the most powerful weapons ever developed: the mobilization of people for the benefit of people. The techniques and strategies of social mobilization which have been crafted to advance the Expanded Programme on Immunization and Oral Rehydration Therapy, through empowering people with knowledge and to link people with systems such as Primary Health Care, are the key for dramatic advances on a host of other challenges - both for protecting and improving the lives of children, and for protecting and improving the lives of everyone. Vigorously promoted, they place within our reach not only achievement of our already established goals, such as UCI-1990, but a great inventory of other possibilities, ranging from the elimination of a disease so old that it is probably the origin of the caduceus symbol of medicine (guinea worm), to the control of a disease so new that it appears in only the very newest of medical textbooks (AIDS). There are many fields such as drugs and street children and child abuse for which we are still largely looking for the answers of what to do, and we must push forward in this search. But in many other fields, particularly as related to child survival and malnutrition, the primary issue

is no longer what to do, but whether we can mobilize the modest additional amount of political will and resources required to achieve dramatic results.

Using this tool of mobilizing and empowering society, the potential for progress for children is limited only by how far the world reaches and how hard the world tries. Just avoiding the two-thirds of the current 40,000 daily child deaths which, as Dr. Nakajima has so aptly noted, are preventable through changes in human behaviour and at low cost, would avoid the equivalent in terms of human life of one Armenian earthquake every day. It is particularly appropriate that this Executive Board consider these issues on the eve of the fourth and final Development Decade of this century.

Restructuring for - or against - children?

While that potential for progress is enormous, my Report to the Board also demonstrates that the danger of neglect of children is equally great. The opportunities before us may be immediate - but they are also vulnerable - in an era of large-scale upheaval and alteration to previously existing norms. Virtually every country now confronts the need for re-thinking accepted notions and systems. In the Soviet Union and the centrally planned industrial economies, "perestroika" is underway. In China, experiments in market forces and more open atmospheres of government have been pioneered over the past decade. The United States and the United Kingdom have also been changing their economic structures over the 1980s - though in the United States, fiscal adjustment to correct its massive budgetary imbalance is yet to be carried through. In Africa and Latin America, high levels of indebtedness are often compelling drastic reordering of priorities and economic restructuring to pay little more than the interest on those debts; the damage to children and other vulnerable populations as a result of economic adjustments which were not sensitive to basic human needs is perhaps immeasurable: the malnourishment of one child may be visited upon three successive generations.

The question yet to be answered is whether these processes of new thinking and new approaches - of structural adjustments - will include children as an objective, or will they perpetuate the all-too-frequent exclusion and neglect of children from the first rank of governmental and societal concern? In asking why the need for "sensitivity" to economic forces (which characterized the 1980s) and the environment (which appears to be emerging for the 1990s) does not yet seem to apply to the most vulnerable of human beings - children, the World Round Table on Children in Paris urged "that 'new thinking' among and within nations recognize a fundamental principle of human affairs: that any well-organized society must be focussed around children."

Putting children at the center

Madam Chairperson and Members of the Executive Board, I believe that UNICEF's most urgent challenge as we enter the 1990s is to find ways to firmly secure the position of children at the center of the concern not only of

parents and families, but of communities and nations. Until that position is secured, children will all too often be the last to benefit from progress, and the first to suffer from economic, political or social deterioration.

While the world possesses the technical capability - and even the financial resources - to reduce the 1980 levels of infant and child mortality rates by half or more ... to remove the mass scourge of a host of diseases which have plagued children and their families throughout history and to retard the spread of newly evolving diseases and social afflictions ... to achieve virtually universal basic education and literacy ... to put basic community services within the reach of the vast majority of the world's population ... to reduce human fertility and population growth rates ... and to significantly improve the quality of life of children by the year 2000, it is, in fact, unlikely - based on current trends - that these goals will actually be met. Key factors which will determine whether or not they actually are met will entail mustering the necessary vision, political will, and leadership, at the community, national and international levels.

The good news of the 1980s is that that vision, will and leadership have been marshalled in many countries and among vast cross-sections of human society, as well as among the organizations, agencies and institutions engaged in work that can help change the world for children. That there has indeed been an impressive increase in the political consciousness and drive for action since the early 1980s is evidenced by the remarkable tangible results in child survival and development reported in The State of the World's Children and in the various reports submitted to you for this Board session ... by the ever-broadening and deepening incidences of serious attention to the situation of children - and commitments to act - paid by a vast array of national leaders and their governments, institutions, organizations, agencies and the media ... and particularly by the progress made towards the adoption of a United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which offers a codification of universal standards for the survival, protection and development of children.

The potential for dramatic improvements in child survival, given the presence of the requisite will, is demonstrated in every continent and under widely different political/economic systems. It is obvious that great things are possible - despite economic constraints and even under the most extreme national conditions. If China - the world's most populous country - can exceed its own ambitious end-1988 immunization goal of 85 per cent by reaching 92 per cent nationwide coverage (and thus reducing deaths and morbidity from vaccine-preventable diseases by half from 1987 to 1988) ... if war-torn El Salvador (observing its 14th Day of Tranquility one week ago) and Greater Maputo in Mozambique can achieve vaccination coverages of under-ones comparable to the cities of New York and London ... if war-strained and devastated Iraq and Iran can reduce infant mortality from over 100 in the late 1970s to 70 and 65, respectively, by 1987 - then it is obvious that the capacity of nations to drastically improve the conditions and wellbeing of their children is limited only by their resolve to try.

It is now clear that a comparable further increase in political will - with a modest further increase in financial resources - is required to achieve the major improvements in the well-being of children which are now deemed attainable during the 1990s. How such will, vision and leadership is further mobilized and harnessed will be an ultimate test of UNICEF - secretariat, Board, partners and allies.

Resolving to try

At least in regard to the most fundamental of all issues - that of children's survival - the question of what can be accomplished is largely answered in the experience of all those assembled in this room, and certainly in the experience reflected in the reports and country programmes presented before you. The question for this Executive Board and the entire UNICEF family, therefore, becomes not so much what can be done, but how we stimulate the will to do it?

Encouragingly, that question, too, has begun to be answered.

It is answered by placing before governments realistic, do-able propositions and strategies, like those which are contained in the Strategies for the 1990s paper which is before this Board, and by raising new ideas and exploring new possibilities, as illustrated by the Bamako Initiative and by our exploring with the Inter-American Development Bank of the possibility of creating a "human capital investment fund", and our search for other debt relief opportunities to both lessen the burden on overly indebted developing countries and ensure increased investment in children.

It is answered by generating public awareness and involvement in the opportunities for improving the conditions of children by involving creative and performing artists and other figures who influence the public, as has been the objective of the various gatherings of Artists and Intellectuals for Child Survival, such as the meeting in Harare chaired by Mrs. Mugabe a year ago, and the similar meeting for Francophone Africa in Bamako just a month ago, as well as by the international conference on the Convention on the Rights of the Child which Mrs. Mubarak convened in Egypt last fall.

It is answered by strengthening the intellectual foundations and reasoned presentations of our case, as was the purpose of the gathering of eminent child development authorities and government officials in the World Round Table on "Today's Children = Tomorrow's World" in Paris three weeks ago, which concluded with recommendations for principal avenues of action for children in the 1990s.

It is answered by combining professional competence and legislative acumen to produce guidelines for both programme action and legislation, as is reflected in the landmark "Cocoyoc Declaration"* resulting from last year's meeting convened by the Health Minister of Mexico on the "Situation and Perspectives on Mortality in Children under 5 in Latin America and the Caribbean".

* copies available

It is answered by expanding political involvement in our concerns, as was accomplished by the centennial conference of the International Parliamentary Union in Budapest last month, for which the principal agenda topic was the "Protection of Children", and which resulted in an historic Resolution* of commitment and action strategies, and which is now spawning legislative initiatives in national parliaments to translate ideas into law.

It is answered by forging the United Nations system into the spearhead of a broad international mobilization for development, through a new approach focussed on common priority goals for the 1990s, as proposed in the paper "UNICEF and the United Nations System" which is before this Board.

It is answered by engaging UNESCO, the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF in joint sponsorship of a World Conference on Education for All in Bangkok next March, "to do for education what the Alma Ata Conference did for health care" - to develop a strategy for accessible education to meet the basic learning needs of all people, and to generate the momentum to extend that strategy in the 1990s.

It is answered by making readily available the information required by families, as through the just-printed Facts for Life*, if they are to effectively participate in reducing the toll of child deaths and malnutrition by more than half. (Parenthetically, Facts for Life, jointly sponsored by UNICEF, WHO and UNESCO, and with involvement of more than 100 international NGOs, will be released officially in July in Paris by the heads of the three agencies at the triennial congress of several thousand pediatricians of the International Pediatric Association, of which our colleague, Dr. Ihsan Dogramaci, has been Executive Director for many years.)

It is answered by calling attention to the extreme plight of children caught in the midst of war, destabilization and apartheid, as we have done in our Children on the Front Line*, the second edition of which I released in Harare earlier this month.

And it is answered by engaging the highest levels of government - the heads of state and government - in situations which require them to review the situation of children in their countries, to develop practical strategies for action, to mobilize national resources, and to provide for inter-regional and international collaboration for the benefit of children, as has been the effect of the attention addressed to children by summit meetings of South Asia, Africa, the Arab States and Central America.

These are but a few of the more prominent examples of the means by which UNICEF and our partners and allies have sought to stimulate new levels of attention and action for children just within the past year.

Stimulating the will to do what can be done

The true challenge for us, and for all who are committed to improving the lives of children, is how to sustain the accelerated progress which has been

achieved ... how to extend leadership consciousness ... how to recruit an ever-broader alliance of people, organizations, institutions and leaders ... how to "exploit" the present improving world situation - both for the benefit of children and so that collaboration for children contributes to further improving the world situation for everyone. All of these add up to the question I posed before: how do we stimulate the will - within communities, within nations, and among the world community - to do that which can be done for children? The issue is not one of trying to accomplish miracles, though many of the achievements of the past decade surely border on the miraculous. But it is an issue of more serious assessment - not by us, but by those who truly have the capacity to act - of what really is possible ... to identify that which is do-able, and then to determine to do no less than that which can be done.

Madam Chairperson, it is in the spirit of identifying possibilities of what really is readily do-able - of raising ideas ... developing strategies ... stimulating interest ... and challenging commitment - that we have placed a number of proposals and questions before this Board and into the marketplace of ideas.

These proposals range from the more technical, such as the debt relief schemes which we have been exploring, to the historic, such as the possibilities of eliminating polio, measles, iodine deficiency disease, and guinea worm disease (the latter a challenge which requires no new technology, no great investment, no sophisticated institutions or equipment, but simply the communication of knowledge and the mobilization of action at the community and family level). In each, the will to try is the principal determining factor.

It is also in the spirit of raising possibilities that I first asked the question, in our State of the World's Children report, as to whether the time might not be right to call a World Summit for Children to generate a great new thrust of attention and determination to translate so many possibilities into achievable realities.

I posed that question with a certain amount of trepidation; I wasn't sure that we wouldn't be laughed out of court. Whyever, many might ask, would the great leaders of the world spend their time to discuss a subject so mundane and small as children?

I underestimated the groundwork which has been laid and the power of our cause for children. It has not been laughter that we have heard, but encouragement and prodding on. Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar has been supportive from the outset, and, to date, more than a score of the world's Heads of State or Government have already indicated their support for this idea. Great newspapers have editorialized in favour of it and asked "Why not?". Meetings of eminent persons, children's advocates, and political leaders have endorsed it. Parliamentarians have introduced resolutions calling for it. And our further experience in the months since, much of which I have reviewed today, has underscored the validity of this idea. And it has

been further suggested that such a Summit might be paralleled by summits for children of local public and private leaders at national, state/provincial, municipal and even neighborhood levels.

Yes, there are those who question it. Heads of Government are too busy for such matters, some may claim. It costs money to convene summits, some will say - money better spent on vaccines or midwife kits. Public relations, some think, is a distraction from the business of programme.

I think the response to these is straightforward. What more important subject is there, for the leaders of our nations, than the future of our nations? Yes, money is needed for vaccines and kits, but in too many cases, too little money - and far too little national social mobilization - is available now for those needs because too few leaders are fully conscious of how much could be done for so little. Building that consciousness - among national and local leaders, within governments, and with the public - is the first prerequisite - as we are seeing in country after country - to the generation and implementation of programme.

It is only if nations are committed to act that children and parents will ever experience the benefits of the programmes, knowledge, resources and techniques which are now available to improve their lives. And it is through leaders that nations are mobilized.

I am more convinced now than when I wrote the words of the question that the time is, indeed, ripe for the world's leaders, in a representative meeting, to consider the possibilities ... identify the strategies ... and determine to move forward to do those things which can be done to improve the world of children. The result, I think, will be to set a standard for all nations that places children at the center of national concern.

And that, as I indicated earlier, is what I believe UNICEF's business is.

* * * * *

Madam Chairperson, let me close with brief references to three topics: UNICEF's income, the Budget and the Sudan.

Income

UNICEF is encouraged by the continuing confidence its donors have demonstrated in UNICEF by their steadily increasing contributions. In fact, I am pleased to announce that UNICEF's total income reached \$711 million in 1988. In 1988, income for General Resources, the mainstay of UNICEF's work, increased significantly, rising from a total in 1987 of \$345 million to a 1988 total of \$393 million, plus \$44 million for a one-time accounting adjustment for GCO. It is noteworthy that three countries had total respective contributions to UNICEF exceeding \$60 million in 1988. The United States

contribution exceeded \$80 million, closely followed by Sweden at approximately \$78 million and Italy at approximately \$66 million. Also noteworthy is that Norway continued to lead the world in per capita support for UNICEF by providing nearly \$11 per Norwegian in 1988. In fact, the four Nordic countries with a total population of 22.6 million, contributed approximately \$107 million for UNICEF General Resources, making up 39 per cent of the total General Resources contributions of governments.

I am pleased to report that support for UNICEF from many governments is continuing to grow in 1989. Virtually all of UNICEF's largest contributors - the United States, Sweden, Italy, Norway, United Kingdom, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands, Switzerland and others have increased their General Resources pledges for this year. Increases are also anticipated from other major donors, such as Japan, which has already provided UNICEF with major contributions for emergency programmes in 1989. UNICEF also wishes to draw particular attention to the USSR, which has increased its General Resources contribution pledge from \$1.7 million to \$19.5 million in 1989. I should also mention that our cash flow situation has been dramatically relieved by the payment, in October of last year, of the entire \$60 million United States contribution to 1989 General Resources.

UNICEF is grateful for all contributions, large and small, and wishes to thank all of the governments which have made contributions in 1988. We also wish to express our deep appreciation for the continued efforts made by the National Committees for UNICEF. Substantial support has also been received from non-governmental organizations.

The Budget

With respect to the increases for the Revised 1988-1989 Budget and the Biennium 1990-1991 Budget, I would make only one basic comment at this time: the relative proportions of the budget to total expenditure are going down. The proposed 1990-1991 budget is projected to decrease to approximately 21 per cent of the total, compared with approximately 25 per cent in the 1986-1987 budget and the 1988-1989 approved budget. Overhead ratios are also projected to decrease, from over 11 per cent to less than 10 per cent.

Finally, it is noteworthy that in comparing 1982-1983 with 1990-1991, we see that despite a more than doubling in expenditures, the number of International Professional core posts actually declines - from 457 to 452 - and average income per year per International core staff increases from \$700,000 to \$1.6 million.

Operation Lifeline Sudan

The Chairperson has already mentioned Operation Lifeline Sudan and my own responsibilities as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and you have copies of the Secretary-General's letter and announcement*. I will not go into detail on this Operation at this time. Many Members of the Board have participated in the Donors' Meetings which we have convened; there are

Situation Reports available to you; I will report to an informal meeting next Tuesday, following my return from the area. I do apologize for my absence from Thursday until mid-day Monday, and for the distraction this may represent with regard to my duties to you, the Executive Board. But children, wherever they are in trouble...and especially when they are in acute danger of starvation...are really what UNICEF is all about.

Madam Chairperson, I would like to end my remarks today by reminding us all of an individual who was a vital member of our UNICEF family and of this Board, in which he was involved for many, many years and served as chairman twice, and who demonstrated what a considerable difference a single person can make. I speak of Nils Thedin in connection with Operation Lifeline Sudan particularly, because this Operation is, I think, exemplary of one of Nils' greatest legacies.

Nils believed that children ought to be protected even when adults are shooting at each other around them. He was an indefatigable advocate of children as a "zone of peace".

We have not achieved peace for children, but, doing what we could to fulfill Nils' expectations, we have managed - in some of the most intractable hostilities plaguing the world - to craft some vestiges of "tranquility" around them. Our first great achievement was in El Salvador in 1985, when both the government and the opposition forces agreed to observe Days of Tranquility to allow the National Vaccination Campaign to proceed. As I mentioned earlier, a week ago El Salvador observed its 14th Day of Tranquility, and what extraordinary results that troubled country has achieved for its children! We have been able to export this idea to other conflict situations, adapting it in various ways to fit the circumstances, and achieve other forms of "Tranquility" in Uganda, Somalia and Lebanon. And now we have eight Corridors of Tranquility to save the children and families of southern Sudan.

Thank you Nils, for the idea you gave us ... for the determined work you did to establish it ... for the legacy you have left us.