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Remarks by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
on the occasion of the presentation of the  
1989 UNICEF Maurice Pate Award  
to  
Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak  
during the 1989 Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York  
17 April 1989



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FOR INFORMATION

Remarks by Mr. James P. Grant

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

on the occasion of the presentation of the

1989 UNICEF Maurice Pate Award

to

Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak

I am delighted to join in welcoming and in honouring Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, the First Lady of Egypt.

I met Mrs. Mubarak for the first time in February 1985. Although there were early signs of what a formidable force she might represent for children's causes, I must say that I was not quite prepared for the full measure of her influence and inspiration. She was already active in creating children's libraries and providing children a healthier school environment, and her master's degree in the sociology of education, received at the beginning of this decade, was a testimony to the professionalism of her interest in children.

Although I have known Mrs. Mubarak for four years now and have seen the remarkable effects of her work for children over an even longer period of time, it was really just this past November that I first personally saw her in full action - at a conference in Alexandria held under her auspices on "The Future United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child". There are, of course, luminaries who will lend their names to a conference or cause, and who will show up in a ceremonial capacity to offer support; these are important contributions. But in addition to these, the substantive nature of Mrs. Mubarak's interventions and her commitment to the issues - demonstrated by her intense involvement throughout two full days of workshops - clearly inspired others to a high level of participation - inspired them to take the issues seriously, and to take effective action. Participants included the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar, one of the leading religious figures in the world, and, as an act of solidarity with Mrs. Mubarak, Mrs. Danielle Mitterrand and Mrs. Sally

Mugabe, the First Ladies of France and Zimbabwe respectively. As our staff in Egypt remarked at the time, "She gets the best out of people".

In a few moments, the Chairperson of UNICEF's Executive Board, Torild Skard, will speak of some of Mrs. Mubarak's official accomplishments on behalf of children. Allow me to speak more about how Egypt has cause to be both proud of the historic advances made for children within very short periods of time, and grateful for Mrs. Mubarak's leadership and perseverance in contributing to their achievement.

Egypt, for example, is really the first country in the world to break through for children simultaneously with what we call the two "twin engines" of child survival: universal child immunization, and broadscale use of oral rehydration therapy (ORT). In the first, immunization against the six main child killing diseases - Egypt achieved the UN goal of universal child immunization (UCI) in 1987, a full three years ahead of the world goal. In the second, vastly expanded use of ORT, Egypt has set the pace for the rest of the world to follow. Seven years ago, diarrhoeal diseases were the number one killer of young Egyptian children, yet fewer than 2 per cent of Egyptian mothers knew about ORT, and fewer than 1 per cent had ever used it. By the end of 1986, 96 per cent of mothers with young children had heard of ORT and 82 per cent said they used it when their children had diarrhoea. This is a tremendous accomplishment. The decline in infant and child mortality rates has been rapidly accelerated by such advances - to the extent that there is a good chance that by 1990 Egypt will have halved 1980 infant and child mortality rates. In the past 12 months alone, approximately 100,000 Egyptian children did not die because of these accomplishments.

As I said in Alexandria, "This is an historically unprecedented advance for any major country in the world, and Egypt is to be commended for the vision, determination, and hard work which made it possible". All who contributed significantly to this accomplishment - Mrs. Mubarak a leader among them - have reason to be proud. We in UNICEF cite Egypt's example often in other countries.

Mrs. Mubarak's contributions on behalf of children have been very pointedly not limited to a single issue, or even to a cluster of issues. She seems to be involved in everything related to children - from the local production and publication of children's books...to the universal child immunization effort...to integrated children's nurseries and day care centers...to improved training for everyone who interacts with children...to active participation in many national, regional and international organizations aimed at improving the well-being of children (to which Mrs. Skard will refer in greater detail in a moment). And, as we saw demonstrated this morning by Mrs. Mubarak's excellent and comprehensive address to the UNICEF Executive Board, Suzanne Mubarak brings a very professional approach to her work on behalf of children.

Indeed, among a growing number of individuals around the world who are making a significant difference by working continuously to improve the situation of children, Mrs. Mubarak shines as a leader and as an example. It is my fond hope that others will emulate her.

The UNICEF Executive Board has made an excellent choice in selecting Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak for the 1989 UNICEF Maurice Pate Award.