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

New York
28 April 1989



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UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1989 session

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

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New York - 28 April 1989

Madam Chairperson,
distinguished delegates:

This Executive Board has moved steadily and expeditiously through its business in these past ten days of meetings. I will therefore keep my remarks brief, in keeping with that spirit of forward movement.

If one were to seek a word which characterizes this year's Executive Board session, I think it would have to be "affirmation". Affirmation that historic progress has been made for children despite the terrible adversities of the past decade. Affirmation that UNICEF remains primarily a "long-haul"

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development agency combatting the silent emergency which afflicts so many hundreds of millions of children, but also retains unique and extraordinary flexibility and resourcefulness for responding to the loud emergencies which too often set children and families back still further. Affirmation that our programmes of cooperation with countries are the center of our work and need to be and increasingly are well-planned and effective. Affirmation that we have done a fairly good job of clearing up the questions raised in past years about the tightness of UNICEF's management procedures and discipline. Affirmation that the world has demonstrated sufficient capacity to dramatically improve the condition of children if only the will can be mobilized to try ... and that the urgent challenge for all who are determined to improve the world for children is to find ways to mobilize that political will. And affirmation that UNICEF is governed by an Executive Board of professionals, working together with their secretariat in committed creative, constructive partnership.

This last point is important to both the Secretariat and the Board. You are, indeed, partners as well as governors. And your responsibility, happily, is not to rubber stamp what we report and propose, but to offer your own experiences, your own perspectives, and your own good judgements, and to mix those together, often with constructive tension, to arrive at the best course and decisions for UNICEF.

We welcome that, and we appreciate it. Indeed, the Board has demonstrated that we have significantly improved the way we do business, so that you may play an ever more vital, guiding role in determining UNICEF's policies and directions and overseeing its management performance. And our Organization is much the better for it.

Of course, this year, you have found some things lacking ... some things which could have been more clear ... some things which seemed less than adequately justified or needed better documentation. We have listened to those concerns, and we have heard them. And we will do our best to ensure that we respond to them.

But, again this year, we have been encouraged by your remarks about things which you found to be well-planned, well-organized, and well-managed. You found programmes that seem to be on target, sustainable, and effective. You found management practices in order. And, I am very pleased to say, you found a staff - including an Executive Director - in whom you have shown confidence as well as expectations, and who are very pleased to work together with you, now and in the years ahead.

I thank you for that.

I thank you for your confidence in me, personally, and in my ability and responsibility for managing this Organization, with accountability to you for results.

And thus I arrive at another word which could characterize this Board session. "Historic". For the 12 years that I have participated in Executive Boards of UNICEF, each session has addressed itself to what could be done, immediately, in the 1980s: the CSDR, with each of its specific components; incremental reduction of infant mortality; and later, the Convention on the Rights of the Child.. For the first time, this 1989 Board session has taken a comprehensive, 10-year forward look at the full range of concerns for children. We are crossing the threshold from the 1980s to the 1990s...and into a new millennium.

The Strategies for the 1990s which you have considered in these two weeks combine the progressive experience of the 1980s with realistic (though challenging) objectives for the 1990s - mixing what's being done with what we're determined to see accomplished in the next 10 years.

Actually, the President of the German Committee for UNICEF, Mrs. Klee, in her presentation yesterday Noon, described what we're engaged in. She told of individual canvasses being distributed across the land, to many different artists. She told of designs being drawn, and then painted in. And she told of those separate canvasses then being brought together - stitched together - and producing the magnificent tableau which encircled and embraced us yesterday.

Isn't that what we've been doing?

Over these past 10 years we've been working with different parts of a very big picture. We've sketched, we've sometimes erased and sometimes re-drawn. And we've painted in many of the scenes. Now we're starting to put that big picture together. And we're beginning to see the great panorama of a different world for children in the next century.

The work is far from done. Even the planning is far from complete. We have an artist's sketch now, in our Strategies for the 1990s and our other work. But especially in the year ahead, we must all work very hard together to fill in the details. Board, Secretariat, National Committees, sister agencies, NGO allies, and, especially, governments. We must all work together to finish the picture of what we hope the world of children will look like in 10 years. And, over the coming year, we must paint the picture of what you expect UNICEF to do to help create that world. That's the challenge for your next Board session.

I should acknowledge a third characterization of this Board session. Of our three sectors of responsibility - programme, operations, and external relations - the latter is most in need of refinement. There is now clear and strong consensus on our programme activities. Our administrative management is sound; the revised and proposed budgets have been approved with the Secretariat taking careful note of your comments and concerns. But we have

all, separately and together, been grappling with the correct objectives, role, function, structure and method of UNICEF's external relations.

It has been a challenging but constructive process. There has been room - much room - for honest and genuine differences of perspective and emphasis. There have been concerns that all concerns are adequately addressed. There has been some understandable misunderstanding. And, possibly, there are some issues which will never be fully resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

But I think there has been fairly strong agreement that the key question for us is how we help shift children from their traditional "under-dog" position, having always to struggle to get into the picture of national policy consideration. How do we put children into a position that the question is not whether they should be a primary object of national attention, but a "given" in the policy process?

It was very encouraging, during the course of these two weeks, to hear virtually every delegation recognize that challenge, and affirm their determination that UNICEF should meet it. You affirmed the centrality of advocacy in programme effectiveness - both in terms of our own delivery of services, supplies and resources, and our stimulation of other sources of input...externally and, especially, by developing countries themselves.

We will do our best to meet the challenge. We will be energetic, ambitious and creative, but, hopefully, also realistic. Indeed, I welcome the comment of one delegate that the purpose of the Executive Board is to root UNICEF's vivid imagination in the hard clay of reality. We will try to keep it rooted there. But I do wish to express my appreciation for the confidence which you have indicated by your encouragement of many of our ideas, and your acceptance of some of them...to give us the opportunity - as you did with, for example, the Innocenti Centre - to test them out and see what we can do to make them work well.

A year from now, we'll see how they're working, or how they've worked, and you can decide whether they should be continued, expanded, or dropped or not repeated.

The people at the heart of UNICEF

Madam Chairperson, any effect which UNICEF has had and can have on the children of the world is measurable in direct proportion to the service of the staff who carry out the directives of this Board. Since this Board last met, we have lost some major players in UNICEF's efforts for children, and within the next few months, others will be leaving.

We may all detect one significant missing element at these deliberations - it has been well over a decade since a UNICEF Board meeting was conducted without Ahmed Mostefaoui's participation as a Regional Director. Ahmed, a national of Algeria, joined UNICEF in 1971 as a Programme Officer in Kinshasa. Five years later, after serving also in Brazzaville, he was

appointed Regional Director for the Central and West Africa Region. In 1983 he moved on to Bangkok, where he served as Regional Director for East Asia and Pakistan until his retirement last month. His voice of experience and his keen, consistent insight are among the qualities already sorely missed, but his influence remains strong.

In our few moments today I clearly cannot adequately pay tribute to "Sasha" Bacic, my long-time and valued colleague, who retired in December. Sasha, a Yugoslav, has been a key figure in UNICEF's work in Africa since he was recruited in Dakar 28 years ago. He moved from there to Abidjan before taking over in New York as Chief of the Africa Desk, and in 1970 he served as Acting Resident Director in Lagos. He also served as Deputy Director in Geneva and then as Director of the Programme Funding Office from 1977 until 1984, when he shifted to Special Assistant to the Executive Director to play an invaluable role for the children of Africa, until - and even since - his retirement in December, working with the United Nations inter-agency process.

Akio Adachi, a national of Japan, retired in January as Comptroller of UNICEF. He had joined as Deputy Comptroller in 1978, and was named to his latest position at the end of 1987. He served us well and with total loyalty.

Effective at the end of this month, Mario Struna will retire as Director of Greeting Card Operations in Geneva. A national of France, he joined UNICEF in 1968 as Operations Manager of GCO in Paris. He transferred to Geneva five years later, and has served there as GCO Director since 1985. Bent Rasmussen will retire in May as Deputy Regional Director (Operations) in the New Delhi Office. A national of Denmark, he joined UNICEF Copenhagen in 1968 as a Production Manager. In 1982 he became the Director of the Integrated Supply Center, and in 1986 he transferred to New Delhi in his current post.

I am sure that many of us have also noted - and felt - the absence of Hans Conzett at this Board session. It has been 30 years since he founded the Swiss Committee for UNICEF, and he served as its chairperson from that time until last year, when he stepped down. The Head of the Swiss Delegation to the Executive Board from 1964 on, he served as Chairman of this Board in 1975-76, and as Chairman of the Programme Committee from 1970-1974. It does not seem correct to speak of him in terms of retirement, so I will simply say we miss his presence with us today. I know I can express on the part of Board members, as well as staff, our best wishes to Hans, who has contributed so much to UNICEF, its National Committees, its Executive Board and the children of the world.

Also missing from your ranks this year is Professor Yuri Danilov, who led the Soviet delegation throughout this decade. He spent many years at the Executive Board and was a long time supporter of children and of UNICEF. The new era of UNICEF-Soviet cooperation owes much to the foundation he laid. A great bear of a man, his interventions, as many will remember, could shake this Board (and the room itself) to the core. But like many great bears, one could quickly discover the caring humanity at his core, including for the

well-being of UNICEF staff who, thanks in good part to his interventions, have an effective cafeteria.

We must also prepare ourselves to say farewell to another UNICEF stalwart, whose wisdom, strength, understanding, charm and wonderful sense of humour have been a gift to this Board for two weeks of every year, while he gives those same great qualities to the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF 52 weeks a year. Sir Bernard Ledwidge plans to step down as Chairman of the U.K. Committee later this year. His leadership will be sorely missed; the happy lightness which he brings to debates in this Board will be especially missed.

Although we offer our farewells to these colleagues and friends - talented and dedicated workers for children - our fondest hope is that we can continue to count on each of them to share the wisdom of their experience in various supporting roles as new staff and volunteers join our ranks. It is far sadder when we must say farewell to friends and colleagues who have been laid to rest.

The Chairperson and I referred at the opening of this Board session, of course, to our loss of Nils Thedin, and to his continuing inspiration in the work for children and for peace.

Another great pioneer of UNICEF was Sam Keeney, who died in October at the age of 95. In the early 1950s, Mr. Keeney served as Regional Director for Asia, at a time when the region stretched from Pakistan to the Philippines and was home to "Half the World's Children" - a term he used as title of a book. He will long be remembered for his contributions to the health and welfare of children of developing countries.

We are also saddened by the loss of Professor Raymond Mande, a strong contributor to this Executive Board from 1959 to 1981, most often as Head of the French Delegation. Prof. Mande also exerted an important influence in the training of social paediatricians from the developing world, and made an important contribution to the Joint Committee on Health Policy.

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Madam Chairperson, it has been a special privilege to work with you and the chairpersons of the two Committees this year - this first time, as you noted (at least as far as I can remember), that all three chairs were occupied by women. It's about time. Though, by no means do we wish to see men excluded from the Board's leadership, it certainly is important to us that women are seen naturally as equal leaders, not only in UNICEF but throughout the development process.

It is also very pleasing to note the unprecedented participation which we have witnessed in this year's session. There have been more individual participants, more countries participating as observers, and more participation in each debate, each meeting and each drafting session, than

ever before. Truly, we are making the business of children everyone's business.

Together, this ever-growing alliance of ours has begun to look over the horizon into the next century. We see the possibility of a world of health and growth - of promise and opportunity - for all the world's children. But the 1980s remind us that there is also the possibility of a less encouraging world for children. But we know that nations now have it in their power to capture that better world. And we are determined to do everything that we can, together, to see to it that nations make that effort.

The year ahead will be very busy for all of us. It will provide opportunities for all of us to make important contributions which can greatly affect the progress of children in the 1990s. Each and every one of us, literally, can make a difference. May I underscore especially the following four areas of action:

- in stimulating, at country or regional level, discussions and debate on priorities for children in the 1990s, as a step toward helping us formulate an operational strategy which will mobilize widespread action for children in all countries;
- in supporting preparatory action for the World Conference on Education for All in Bangkok in March of next year - to ensure that this Conference becomes the launching point for a major educational effort over the next decade; I hope that this Conference and the ongoing effort beyond it will enjoy very strong participation from among the members of this Board;
- in supporting the final stages toward agreement on the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
- in encouraging new means to engage all levels of society - from Heads of State to heads of family, and all in between - to take personal responsibility - to create the political will - for the survival, protection and development of children.

Madam Chairperson, before concluding, let me call the attention of Board members to two items which are now being circulated:

First, the Information Note which I promised on the idea of a World Summit for Children has been issued as E/ICEF/1989/CRP.24; I hope this will be helpful to you and will answer many of the questions that have been raised. It reflects many of the discussions and very constructive suggestions and advice which has been offered by Board members and your Ambassadors over the past two weeks.

Second, (this is where I make my annual sales pitch!) - the 1989 Proposal for Supplementary Funding is now out ... the largest Salesbook we have ever produced, representing a massive collection of opportunities for children which await only the funding to allow seizing them. I trust that every delegate will take this book back to your capital and encourage positive consideration.

Madam Chairperson and distinguished delegates :

I'm privileged to look forward to a new term as your Executive Director. I'm pleased to work with you. And I'm extraordinarily proud of the staff and volunteers who work so tirelessly, so valiantly, and so competently for UNICEF and for children.