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Statement of Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to the  
12<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Family Medicine  
sponsored by the  
World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA)

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Statement of James P. Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF

to the

12th World Conference on Family Medicine

sponsored by the

World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA)

Jerusalem, May 28, 1989

I regret not being able to be with you today as I value highly your work and believe your organization, as a partner of WHO and UNICEF, can play an increasingly important role aiding countries to establish primary health care (PHC) systems. The projects you have already undertaken in Portugal and Beijing provide the foundation for your future work in establishing departments to train family doctors who then become the first echelon of referral for basic health workers in the PHC support network.

Your undertakings make a significant contribution to long-term efforts to strengthen PHC. As doctors talking with doctors, you can encourage medical professionals to shift the emphasis of their health services - to strengthen the support system necessary for basic health workers in rural villages and urban neighbourhoods to meet health needs within the community.

Greater potential exists today to bring to life the principles of PHC than at any other time in history. As Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the World Health Organization, told 1,500 health educators 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 - if only they were properly informed and motivated. Immunization alone could save 3 million lives - and another 3 million deaths a year could be prevented by oral rehydration, a simple and cheap technology."

We know that the scientific and technical knowledge already exists in your hands - as family doctors - to prevent and to cure the major killers of children everywhere on our planet. You have this knowledge and these skills, and have employed them daily.

The greater question before us, and the greater challenge to you as family physicians, is how to ensure that this knowledge is effective in reaching the millions upon million of children - in fact, the majority of the world's children - who you - and your several hundred thousand colleagues around the world - will never see in your offices or in your hospital wards.

How, in other words, do we reach the unreached - those millions of children whose deaths could be prevented, as Dr. Nakajima has said, through properly supporting and motivating families?

WONCA has many allies in the task of reaching the unreached. What we sometimes refer to as a "Grand Alliance for Children" is gathering to spread vital health knowledge and to provide the support necessary. For such a Grand Alliance to be effective, however, there must be an agreed set of messages to communicate. It is most gratifying, therefore, that in the task of bringing basic health knowledge to those who need it most, WONCA has participated in a major step forward through your partnership in publishing, along with WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO, a collection of 55 priority messages on 10 themes under the title Facts for Life. Facts for Life contains, in message form, the most important information now available to help parents protect their children's lives and growth. It is knowledge on which there is world-wide scientific consensus; it is knowledge on which most parents can act; and it is knowledge which has the potential to dramatically reduce child deaths and child malnutrition. It is therefore knowledge which every family, by right, should have.

Facts for Life has been especially prepared to present this information in messages which can be understood by all. Although the ultimate recipients are the families who must actually use the knowledge, the more immediate target is the broad spectrum of communicators of all kinds - community workers and groups, health and medical educators, and all those who can help to put today's knowledge at the disposal of today's parents so that it can actually be used to save the lives and improve the health of those previously unreached by such benefits of modern progress.

Another arena of unprecedented potential toward improving the well-being of children exists in the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention, which is targeted for adoption, hopefully, by the United Nations General Assembly during the fall of 1989, represents an opportunity to establish global norms regarding the rights of children, but also in the responsibilities of societies to protect those rights. Passage of the Convention, in itself, will not mean that children's rights will be met nor that our responsibilities toward children will be fulfilled. Rather, it will establish a global standard.

Unfortunately, passage of the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child through the General Assembly in 1989 and its ratification by countries

thereafter, will not occur automatically. Adoption and ratification of the Convention will require an all-out effort by all people involved in issues having to do with the health and well-being of children.

Family physicians have a trusted role in their community. You and your colleagues in many countries can provide invaluable support in making the Convention a reality during the coming years. It will then take its place with the other powerful forces for good that are, indeed, changing the world.

Your work in primary health care, your partnership in publishing Facts for Life and your support of the Convention give promise of a growing role in international co-operation for the World Organization of Family Doctors in the coming years.

Thank you.