

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1989-0037

Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
United Nations Association of the United States
National Conference on the United States and the United Nations
[Unofficial Transcript]

Washington, D.C.
9 November 1989



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Item # **CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1998-02163**

ExR/Code: **CF/EXD/SP/1989-0037**

United Nations Association of United States National Conference
Date Label Printed **18-Jan-2002**

cover + 8 pp + 06

Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

to the
United Nations Association of the United States
National Conference on the United States and the United Nations

Washington, D.C. - 9 November 1989

As we gather here three weeks before the leaders of the two superpowers meet on board a warship somewhere at sea to start charting the course of what we might call the post post-war era, isn't it fitting that this conference, looking at the future of the United Nations, in fact look back almost a half-a-century to two leaders meeting aboard a warship somewhere at sea - to chart a common course toward a world with security, dignity and decency for all of its inhabitants. I think that many, but not all of you, will remember that it was in August 1941 that Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met twice off the coast of Newfoundland to craft the Atlantic Charter, shaping into an international agreement Roosevelt's four freedoms which had been enunciated earlier that year in a State of the Union address: the freedoms from want and fear, and the freedoms of speech and religion. It was on the common principles put down in the Charter that the two leaders said their countries "based their hopes for a better future for the world". And those two men laid the foundation for the United Nations to transform these hopes into reality.

When you think back, what a bold and heady moment it was at that time: it was four months before Pearl Harbor, Britain was embattled in a corner of a Europe overrun by Hitler (who had also overrun much of the Soviet Union), Japan was marching through China. Yet amidst that turmoil, they could meet and lay out that vision for the world.

How do we revive that spirit? Can we mobilize that kind of a vision now, as they did in 1941?

For more than four decades, during which the "international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples", to which the Charter of the United Nations refers, was distorted and undermined by cold war and confrontations, the multilateral system never really worked the way it

was intended. Can we now, in this warm new spirit of conciliation and new potential, return to the founding dreams of the United Nations? Can we for the first time have all the countries of the world working together, collaboratively, on freedom from want? Could we perhaps even dream new dreams, rooted in both our experience and in the vastly changed resources of our world, as we move from the 1980s to the 1990s?

The world of today is undeniably in a state of flux. But change, as we know, is not only a challenge, a threat; it is an opportunity, too. Political changes that were unimaginable a month ago, a week ago, as several people have mentioned, are today's lead stories in the "Today Show", in the New York Times. Some things have not changed. Or, if they have changed at all, for many countries they have even changed for the worse in the 1980s. As you have heard, for almost a billion people in the developing world - approximately one-sixth of humankind - the march of human progress has now become a retreat.

In many countries development is being thrown into reverse, particularly for the poor. Across Latin America, across Africa, and for additional hundreds of millions in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, economies are in crisis and millions are moving into unemployment in societies for which there is no social security built for a market economy system: no unemployment insurance, no other social security measures for those who are not linked to an establishment system. Throughout most of Africa and much of Latin America average incomes have dropped - by more than 10 per cent in Latin America and by more than 25 per cent in Africa in the 1980s.

Fortunately, the situation in much of Asia is much better. Asia has continued, in most countries, to progress. But we can never forget that Asia is home to 80 per cent of the world's poor, and even if the relative progress that has been made in so many countries continues, it will still remain home to 70 per cent by the end of this century.

It is hard for us to imagine, but it is true, that Third World countries are now sending tens of billions of U.S. dollars to the industrialized countries each year, due in large part to the shocking debt total of the developing world which now substantially exceeds a trillion dollars at US\$1,300 billion. As Bob McNamara said a few days ago, it is like having an ill person giving a blood transfusion to the healthy.

It has been a grim decade for the poor of the world. As Dave Hopper mentioned, when these crises come, it is usually the poor that take the brunt of the impact.

If the threshold of the 1990s is indeed an open moment in history, an opportunity amidst the flux to seize the initiative and craft a very different world, how can we ensure that the same blossoming forces that are giving a new birth of freedom in many countries of the world, such as we are seeing in eastern Europe, are also harnessed to give a new birth of dignity and decency that can be shared by all people and all societies?

Last month I listened to Begum Nusrat Bhutto, the mother of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who delivered an eloquent and moving address in

New York, and I would like to share with you some of her words, words meant to describe her native country, but, I believe, equally applicable to the global scene. She said:

"Development and democracy cannot be severed - they are the two faces of the same currency of freedom.

"Our political opposition to tyranny alone will not solve the problems of the people.

"Tyranny stifles freedom, yes. But so does hunger.

"Tyranny chokes creativity, yes. But so does illiteracy.

"Tyranny denies opportunity, yes. But not as much as infant mortality.

"Our political agenda cannot exist for its own end, but rather it must exist to implement a social agenda.

"At the heart of that social agenda is education, housing and health for a people who have paid with their own blood...for the privilege to be free."

And in a sense this, it seems to me, is a central challenge as we look to the period ahead.

One of the points that Mrs. Bhutto's remarks brings home to us is that, in the midst of all the new attention to Eastern Europe, and the desire and the responsibility to be nurturing and supportive there, it is important that we do not neglect our relations on other fronts. The opening of new doors to the East must not be the occasion for slamming shut still more doors to the South by devoting all our attention and all our supportive resources to helping encourage change in Eastern Europe. We must not turn our backs on the great masses of the world's population living in abject poverty and near hopelessness in the developing countries.

But how can we use this new warming of East-West relations to have a positive impact on all countries of the world? How can we guard against the possibility that the East-West reconciliation could have detrimental effects on some of the more socially and economically vulnerable nations? Certainly, we see on many fronts today a creeping benign neglect toward Latin America and toward Africa in particular.

What are the opportunities for us to make this an area of creative and enlightened collaboration with an entire world society?

Suddenly these days we see such headlines as from the New York Times two days ago: "U.S. and Soviets Agree to Back UN Agencies". How do we capture the spirit of the US/Soviet agreement to make more use of the multilateral system? How, at this stage, can the multilateral system be used in a new

spirit of collaboration among nations, to work together more effectively, both to solve common problems, and to help each other - thus, as a whole, becoming greater than the sum of our parts?

That this series of questions should arise naturally from current events is especially fortunate, as the UN is this year, planning the International Development Strategy (IDS) for the Fourth Development Decade. It has been perhaps fashionable to point to the shortcomings of the previous development decades, but I would like to point out that there have been some focused but stellar successes. UNICEF, for example, built its Child Survival and Development Revolution (CSDR) strategy around goals of the Third Development Decade set in 1980, 1981. Internationally agreed goals derived from nationally-perceived needs and prioritized, feasible targets offered an excellent focus to maximize the return on development efforts on behalf of children. The Child Survival and Development Revolution grew out of Third Development Decade commitment to the reduction in infant and child mortality, universal child immunization against the six main child-killing diseases by 1990, expanded use of oral rehydration therapy to combat the world's biggest killer of children - diarrhoeal dehydration, and expansion of water and sanitation facilities.

The most measureable of these successes has been progress toward the Universal Child Immunization Goals for 1990. In the beginning of this decade fewer than 10 per cent of the world's children were immunized, more than 4 million children were dying each year from these 6 diseases. Today, some 70 per cent are covered. And the lives of more than 2 million children were saved last year alone as a result of these accelerated efforts, with every indication that the annual savings will double within the next few years.

Planning the Fourth Development Decade forces the issue of development strategy, and will perhaps quicken our pace of designing direction for the UN system. We are in a far more advantageous position at the outset of the Fourth Development Decade because of recent events than we have been at the outset of any previous development decade since the First Development Decade, which enjoyed the strong support of President Kennedy. We have much more to build on, and while surely the CSDR is a sterling singular example, we should seek to build on these experiences and to adapt what works to broader contexts where applicable. I'll come back to this in a moment.

During this decade, as another example, "adjustment with a human face" has emerged from a void and in a very few years has found its way into all strata of development discourse - institutional, academic and popular, and it is rapidly finding its way into development policy, as well. Now we hear increasingly of the need to attend to the human dimensions of development, and that that concept should be key in designing the upcoming strategy for the 1990s.

Last night, as I was collecting my thoughts about the issue of human welfare within the context of the "state of the multilateral system" as our topic is described, one of my staff joked that no one is ready for this in the current state of rapid geo-political change and flux. "Anything," he said,

"we think based on the realities of today may be obsolete by tomorrow!" There is an important truth to the fact that the whole situation is "up in the air". It points to the true openness of this historical moment. *

It is a moment of relative peace, a precious gift entrusted to our generation and particularly to those of us who are in the more fortunate countries, situated in a strong position from which to move. We could relax and enjoy this gratuitous moment of peace, and wait to see what happens - let the chips fall as they may. Or we can apply ourselves fully to looking at this seemingly new world with a vision unclouded by old expectations, searching to discover the most important opportunities, and preparing ourselves to seize them.

What will we make of this wide open moment?

We have seen in the 1980s very substantial progress on 3 of the 4 freedoms. Certainly, the progress on freedom of religion around the world has been spectacular in the 1980s. The progress on freedom of speech has been spectacular in the 1980s, although there has been a retrogression in China. But even in China, if one compares the situation of today with that of 10 years ago, a vast forward movement will be found. There certainly has been great forward movement on freedom from fear and freedom from war in the world.

The one freedom which has stalled in the 1980s is freedom from want. We still have some 40,000 children dying every day, and what makes it unconscionable is that two-thirds of these could be readily preventable at low-cost. I would suggest that in the next 18 months there really ought to be a serious effort to get the world community to dedicate itself to spectacular advances in the 1990s to the concept of freedom from want. We do know from studies made by the World Bank and by many others sources that to overcome the worst aspects of mass poverty, of illiteracy, of ill-health, of malnutrition, that these can be accomplished today for relatively modest costs - for 5 per cent a year of what is being spent on defense one could break the back of mass poverty in the course of the worst consequences of mass poverty.

I think the question is in this period of flux how do we seize this opportunity, or how do we not loose the opportunity because clearly we are not ready as of this moment to seize it. First, I would say it is extremely important to make the most for sustaining and expanding the current channels that are working. Thus, I would say it's extremely important for us to make sure the World Bank, for example, functions - that it gets its ODA expansion and that the IMF get the expansion that's under discussion by it. In both of these cases, the United States today is the principle restraining force in rendering these two institutions substantially more effective, and you are in a position to do something about that.

*[Editor's note: The Berlin wall "fell" 2 hours after this address was delivered.]

Secondly, on existing channels there is the Special Session of the International Development Strategy coming up next Spring at the United Nations. It calls for careful and innovative planning to be sure to use this opportunity to accelerate the forward momentum.

Third, I would say that we should promote specific goals which are both high priority and readily do-able at moderate costs. There are so many things that can be done in this world today that are readily do-able - they require only the serious effort to undertake them. The costs are moderate. And it's becoming increasingly unconscionable not to do these things.

Now what are these sorts of goals? Well, in my field it is, for example, child mortality. The goal has been set of halving child mortality rates of 1980 by the year 2000. Two-thirds of the child deaths that occur today are readily preventable by such low-cost means as immunization, oral rehydration therapy, food supplements such as iodized salt and the like. Achievement of this goal would save the lives of 50 million children in the course of the 1990s - 50 million children - and it would have the incidental benefit of contributing substantially to slowing population growth itself - that's another subject. Within this goal we would contribute to the 21st century: polio could be eradicated from the face of the earth; guinea worm could be eradicated from the face of the earth; tetanus, which now takes the lives of a million people a year could be virtually eliminated; so could such traditional diseases as the iodine-deficiency diseases of goitre and others.

Equally, it is very much within our power in the 1990s to support the achievement of basic access to schooling for all. This too is very do-able and there is, as was mentioned by David Hopper, the Bank Conference coming up in March jointly sponsored by the World Bank, UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF.

Now, what is it that makes these so do-able at this time? Well, there are three elements which combine to make these possible at this time. First, over recent decades there have been important technological advances, so if you take the single biggest killer of children in the world - the dehydration from diarrhoea - there is, as many of you know, now a 6 cent packet which can be mixed with a liter of water, and administered by parents at home as an effective cure. Unfortunately, the majority of hospitals in the world, the majority of doctors of the world, and the majority of mothers of the world don't know this or do it. In this case the technology exists, and the same thing is true for the vaccine preventable diseases that I mentioned earlier. We can immunize a child for life in the developing countries against 6 diseases for vaccines that cost us a total of 50 cents.

The second major development that makes so many of these do-able is one that has been mentioned earlier. There has been, as we all know, a revolution in communication capacity. So much of what can be done to improve the well-being of people in the developing world - of the poor - depends really on empowering them with knowledge about oral rehydration therapy, about the new crops that are available for subsistence farmers, about the importance of vaccinating their children, of promoting breast-feeding. And this revolution in communication capacity - the ubiquitous radio, the increasingly rapid

expansion of television, even now this VCR and the FAX, all of these are allowing us to communicate with people in a way that was not possible just a few years ago.

The third element that makes these do-able is that we are discovering that when you set a crucial yet feasible goal, it is possible to get an effective collaborative effort. In field after field we are finding that once one of these goals is set, for example in the child survival field, once the goal is established it is possible to put together a massive coalition to collaborate on this. And the coalition today on child survival and development is lead by the World Bank, WHO, UNICEF and UNDP. Once these goals are set and the coalition begins to gather, a tremendous synergism occurs.

Finally I would say that we have learned in recent years that when you get an important and do-able goal that can be perceived by the public of the world and understood by them, they provide the public opinion pressure on governments to move on these. We have seen this most clearly in the area where the United Nations has had its biggest successes, which is in dealing with disasters. One of the great successes of the post-war era has been dealing with refugees. The UNHCR, High Commissioner on Refugees, has twice been the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. You can predicate that wherever there's a major refugee crisis in the world, when 100,000 people move across a border, that within a month they will be there functioning at, let's say "sea-level", but providing a safety net. And it works. Secondly, we have learned that wherever you get a massive disaster now such as we saw in Cambodia 1979 and 1980; Ethiopia in 1984; Sudan last year - that again, the world will respond. There is a collaborative effort with the UN at the heart of this, with many other entities collaborating.

And our challenge really is: How do we get this same kind of push behind what I call the "new opportunities" as distinguished from the retrogressions? The retrogressions people see in the headlines of papers. A plane crash is such a retrogression. The fact that, let's say in India, when the Bhopal Union Carbide disaster occurred, that same day the number of children who died because they weren't vaccinated against the 6 diseases was more than the total death toll in Bhopal. And this was true the week before, the month after. This same thing could be said of diarrhoea: more children died of diarrhoea that day than everybody at Bhopal. But the diarrhoeal deaths didn't make the news - you couldn't mobilize. Increasingly, however, in the last few years we have begun to mobilize around these "silent emergencies" and I think this is one of the skills that we are learning. We are learning it well enough on the child survival front that we expect in two weeks to have the General Assembly adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Secondly, it looks as if in September 1990 we will see the first ever East-West-North-South Summit, and the sole topic of discussion will be issues related to children. It would be the first Global Summit in history, and would focus on how to actually do the readily do-able for children - how to move on these new opportunities. Clearly, there are major opportunities here if we will only seize them on the "Freedom from Want" side.

I would finally close by saying that one possibility is that to call into

mind not only the vision that Churchill and Roosevelt had in 1941 but to remember the vision of Monnet. Monnet set up a commission of people who provided for the formation of the new Europe, for much of the thinking, the motor of power, and the continuing force behind it. I would myself think that the establishment of the equivalent of a Monnet Commission for the world on the Freedom from Want front could make a tremendous contribution in this very promising decade that lies ahead. Thank you.