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

New York  
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When I scheduled this meeting, I thought that we should not allow the final action on the Convention to take place without it being properly heralded in UNICEF. And as you all know, yesterday, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted. I myself consider this to be another one of those near miracles.

I was in Mexico City in May of 1979 when the Polish Delegation spoke to this proposal for a Convention on the Rights of the Child. I was then the leader of the U.S. Delegation to the Executive Board and I can remember my comment back to Washington that it was - something to this effect, "highly unlikely to be achieved in either my working or living lifetime." And this wasn't because I had any distaste for it but I did know how difficult human rights conventions were to get through. I knew the great reservations that many countries, industrialized countries, had on these. I knew that to get a Convention on the Rights of the Child through would mean meshing vastly different cultures - Islamic, Christian and even within that, the difference between the Catholics and the Protestants as we saw on the abortion issue, on how to pull all of these together into one document.

And for the first several years, the meetings took place of the working committee with stalwart non-governmental organizations dedicated to seeing to it that something happened, as we see so often in the field where it is non-governmental organizations that put their view on something and push it first and they, in turn, manage to convince some governments. There was the miracle yet to be properly explained of how the Poles carried the initiative, pushed it as far as they did.

And it was by the by the mid-1980s that we began to come under increasing pressure, UNICEF, to participate more heavily in the drafting of the Convention on the Child. And some of you remember in response to these pressures we did send (? Tarzie Vatachie) for the first time to participate in the working group meeting in - when was it Victor? - 1985, or '86. And this was a part of a changing attitude on our side that something could be accomplished in this, but I can remember lagging myself. I can remember when Allegra Morelli came into my office (she was then dealing with NGO affairs for us) and made a most eloquent, emotional, forceful plea that we had to be involved vastly more differently, vastly more effectively, and expressed her own conviction that if we did so we could achieve success.

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We all have our personal turning points, and for me that was my turning point. But already we had, I guess, our anchor who had been following this from the beginning, was Marjorie Newman-Black in Geneva, who had been with us all the way through from beginning to end, more or less. But she had been attending, participating, while corporately UNICEF was not that deeply involved. Now, subsequent to our decision in 1986 to really throw UNICEF behind this; I think many of you are aware of what then happened. And it's always rather, to me, exhilarating to others maybe fearsome, when UNICEF as a corporate entity takes something on. We did take the Convention on the Rights of the Child on, in a big way.

I was just in Nairobi this weekend, and I made a case study of what had happened in East Africa in Kenya on work on the Convention, and it's unbelievable how much work was done, involving local groups, the medical society, women's groups, the parliamentarians, artists and intellectuals, the production of many books, much political activity: ferment from the bottom which then reached up to where, as some of you will remember the OAU Summit two years promoted the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But throughout the world, once the decision went out from here that UNICEF would do everything possible to facilitate the adoption of the Convention at the UNGA in 1989, your performance has been remarkable.

And the end result of the Convention - as I say it's a near miracle that we have one - as the Secretary General noted, it is an incredible diplomatic accomplishment, diplomatic in the sense of diplomacy at its best, because we have managed, in these last 18 months, UNICEF has not tried to push it through in a sliding way. We've encouraged every country to identify the problems they have with it, the different religious groups to have the problems they see, so we could get the dialogue going so the dialogue could take place a year ago or six months ago and not wait 'til the very end. So that we did end up with this final result that was commented on in the newspaper and elsewhere: the final action was two minutes. But this was the result of fantastically good staff work.

For example, for the Islamic world the meeting in Alexandria was key; but it involved the grand sheik, the leading religious figure of the Sunni world, and they identified many problems with the Convention. And then they went on to the November special meeting of the working group, and half of the adjustment was made by the group working on the Convention, and half of the adjustment was made by the Islamic forces to this. And finally, around the world there was such a push for this when you realize that it was twice, three times the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) has endorsed the adoption of the Convention; twice the OAU (the Organization of African Unity) Summit; the Francophone Summit; the Non-aligned Summit; and most recently, a month ago, the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Summit. They all came out in support of the Convention.

A force was created, but at the same time there was an ambiance of discussion, of give and take, so that I could find, traveling around the world, Head of State after Head of State saying, there's something in that Convention that is not optimal from our point of view, but we do believe it is such a tremendous accomplishment that we should accept the good, and not

sacrifice it in the interest of the best. This is the word I got from China, this is the word I got from the Holy See, this is the word we got from the Americans, this is the word we got from the Swedes, etc., etc. And out of this came that culminating moment yesterday, when it was adopted in the morning, the celebration in the afternoon, and I genuinely believe that this could well become for children the Magna Carta of children's rights.

We do know that children, despite all the fine rhetoric about children, are held in pretty low priority by governments when real push comes to shove. You see it in all the civil wars going on. Currently, around the world you can say on average probably ten children die for every soldier that dies in these civil wars. We know that when the economic crises come and there are the big economic shifts, whether its in China, children suffered when the shifts came to the market economy and the communes were abolished. Over a third of the preschools closed; much of the health services vanished in the immediate years after that. We have seen in the United States, where today the children of the bottom half are worse off income-wise today than ten years ago, and the safety net is weaker than it was ten years ago.

So this Convention marks a turning point, and I do believe that with the breakthroughs in child health we've been getting around the world through the CSDR, through the net of allies that's come out of this, and through what I will refer to in a moment, the Summit for Children, that ten years from now we can look back and say this was a very critical period.

Children's rights are still being violated grossly in mass number. And I suppose the most graphic of these still is the fact that on the child survival front 40,000 children died yesterday, another 40,000 today, and as we all know, about two thirds of those could be readily prevented just through empowering parents with knowledge, governments providing a modest support service. This is the most obvious, clear cut violation of the rights of a child - every one of those children who died, his rights have been grossly violated, to say nothing of the 30-40,000 children who became crippled yesterday because society didn't take some modest initial step. But I'm convinced that we're on the path, that ten years from now looking back, we will wonder how we could have been so indifferent ten years before to allow these things to happen on this scale.

Now when I look back on this Convention and the endless hours, I have mentioned two people who - Marjorie Newman-Black who was with this all the way through, as you know, Paula this has been in the last two years under the leadership of a team lead by Victor Soler-Salas, and he can take a great deal of satisfaction from it. An anchor point of course for all of this had been Kimberly Gamble - she has really been our leading lobbyist for this for the past more than two years. I regret that I told her quite seriously that she would hang if this Convention didn't get adopted. I suppose she would have worked just as hard without it, but we did joke about this in front of Heads of State and others in her presence, that she was the person upon whom we really did depend. And I would myself like very much to recognize these people. There is a special medallion that's been printed recognizing the Convention and the role for this of the Center for Human Rights and of UNICEF, and I would like to asked the concerned people to come up.

(Introduction of recipients)

Marjorie Newman-Black, who provided unflagging support throughout for adoption of the Convention. To Allegra Morelli, who first inspired me to strong action on the Convention. To Kimberly Gamble, lobbyist extraordinaire for the Convention, with many, many, many thanks. I'm glad you're not hanging. To Victor Soler-Salas, who so successfully led the UNICEF effort for the Convention.

Now I tried to indicate that the success of the Convention is the result of many, many people. I can see many of the faces in this room, of people who have played the role in mobilizing NGOs, in mobilizing parliamentarians, in mobilizing our distant intellectuals in producing the marvelous printed materials that we have used so successfully. But I did want to identify those first four. Others will get their recognition in other ways, at other times, including our people in the field who have played such an important part in this.

I thought we could also take this opportunity to note that the year ahead promises to be a most challenging one. The past six months have been dramatic one since we met. They have been dramatic ones on the international scene, evidenced most dramatically by what we've been seeing on television from Eastern Europe. Clearly, the Cold War as we knew it before is very much on the way to being over. It holds out the likelihood now, the probability, that we will see over the next five years a very significant reduction in the vast expenditures for arms that have characterized on a steadily increasing basis the situation in this world ever since the late 1940s. It holds out the very clear prospect that the regional conflicts will be coming down without the superpowers on both sides fueling them with arms, and as part of the Cold War confrontation. I think we can forecast that in the 90s, in the next five years, we can see a very significant reduction in military expenditures in the developing countries.

So this is all a very positive set of developments. Basically the political scene calls for far more political participation, and what we have learned from around the world is that usually the wider the political participation, the better it is for children. Where the world will emerge in the next two or three years is very hard to predict. We can all hope. I know that when Shevednarze was here, he equated the crisis in Marxism with the crisis that capitalism faced in 1929, and said, what we are seeking to do with Marxism in the next several years is what capitalism did with the New Deal, and with Roosevelt in North America. But there is a very difficult and complex world ahead: it has many hopeful signs, it has many threats. It raises for us in a very parochial way the danger that a large part of what we call foreign aid, development aid, will be shifted from the South - it's already too meagre - to Eastern Europe. Half a dozen industrial countries have already started to make that shift. Our hope of course, is that out of a vision of a much more hopeful world, with the reduction of arms, that the world can be mobilized to take on challenges in common, and with a new synergism, there will be a new level of economic cooperation, that is not one that is just involving the industrial countries, but picks up the whole globe.

And its against this background of course that we find the prospects for a World Summit for Children - most hopeful. You will all remember that it was

less than one year ago when the State of the World's Children Report proposed the possibility of a World Summit for Children, recognizing the fact that the principal lesson that UNICEF had learned over the last five years, was that if you would mobilize a country for children, for doing the doable, through social mobilization, it was possible to accomplish near miraculous results for children. And the proposal for the Summit was, why not take on the whole world with this spirit. And it built upon the SAARC Summit, the OAU Summit, the fact that at the Moscow Summit with Gorbachev and Reagan, the one Third World subject they had raised was the health breakthrough for children, and the opportunities and need for increased support in that regard.

It now looks, as you know, that this Summit is not only likely, but probable. The expected date will be next September, the fourth week, roughly the same time as the General Debate, for a day and a half, and that special effort will be made to have the Heads of State and Government of the UNICEF Executive Board participate, but also to have others that are interested to come as well. This would be the first ever in history East, West, North, South Summit, and to have that kind of a coming together for children is, I would say a most auspicious beginning follow-up on the Convention, which still needs to be ratified and, as I indicated on the Child Survival Front as an illustration, still needs to be implemented.

But we can really see a very positive future in the 90s ahead for us. As you all know, we had our gathering at Mohonk. Some seventy of us from all over the world gathered to discuss what should be our goals and strategies for the 1990s. It was a highly participatory meeting. We identified the goals; we had a good discussion about how do you face the different goals, so that everybody doesn't have to do everything at the same time. We talked about what UNICEF might look like in the future, and you know, if you look at the last ten years, where UNICEF has grown from 1,500 staff in 1979 to 4,400 staff today, are we going to be 12,000 staff ten years from now? Where the income was less than 200,000,000 ten years ago, it was some 700,000,000 last year. Are we talking about an organization that will be \$2,000,000,000 in 1989 dollars ten years from now?

These are all the kinds of questions that were discussed implicitly.....(break in recording) (There was an) agreement, a consensus that UNICEF will never be an organization that can do everything itself, (be the principle resource transfer?) and that there are merits to UNICEF remaining an organization that is relatively small, both in terms of people and in money, even though what we are talking about is how do we increase the impact of our programmes by 200, 300, 400% in the 1990s, over the already significant impact that we have now. I found it a very exciting meeting, and it was very exciting to go from there and within a month to follow it up with what we now see as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Looking ahead just a few months down the road in early March will be the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand. And our hope is that for this most important really of all fields, basic education, that this will provide the same kind of vitality to a return to energy for the education sector that the Alma Alta Conference and the Child Survival and Development Revolution has brought to the health sector. This still lies ahead of us; it would take a great deal of creative input and time all of you for this to succeed.

Clearly the Summit - right now it sounds like an abstraction. But UNICEF is being asked to be the Secretariat for the Summit. And this will in turn mean that we will have a tremendous challenge, not only to be the Secretariat for a meeting, but this will be very much like the Convention, the International Year of the Child, where there are programmatic implications of this. And while the Summit is being held, we are hopeful that there will be all sorts of events taking place - mini-summits: a mini-summit, let's say, in Calcutta, or in New York City, on the problems of children by the leaders of those societies on that; mobilization of the religious leaders of all faiths of the world for children. And, just as for the International Year of the Child, for the Convention, we've had this major programmatic mobilization around the world, we would see this occurring also in this field.

Meanwhile, of course, we are going on and doing all of our essential, indispensable business that has made UNICEF what it is, that makes UNICEF so highly thought of: producing wells, strengthening health systems, working on early child development. I received a very magnificent phone call yesterday morning from New Delhi, telling me that the Indira Ghandi Memorial Trust had picked UNICEF for its 1989 award, as the individual agency, institution, that had made outstanding contributions to peace, development, and advance of human well-being. Prime Minister Bhutman was the last recipient, the recipient before her was Mr. Gorbachev. So, I think this is another indication of the recognition that we get for all the things that you are working on in our various parts. We've got our emergency people, who continue to do the magnificent job in emergencies. I myself have been most directly involved with our operation, Lifeline Sudan, where really the UNICEF as an institution has responded so magnificently.

I am, as your Executive Director, very proud to be your Executive Director, and I see the 90s as being, prospectively, the greatest decade for children that the world has ever seen. We obviously can't control all the events of the world, but it looks as if we are off to an auspicious start and there's every reason for us to be able to expect some truly major accomplishments.

Let me move from these high visions to some of our more mundane matters that we have very much still on our minds. As you know, we have been concerned with how do we have a stronger role for women in UNICEF. We already stand out well ahead of most UN agencies, but we are committed to having a third of our professionals women by December, 1990, and I thought you would be interested to know that we have reached 31.1% in the international category as of November 1st, and 36% in the national category in core posts, which averages out to 32.5% globally. Of the international and national project posts, 32.7% are also occupied by women, with 30.2% in international category, and 36.4% in national category. I would just say that I am determined that we continue to move in this direction; the world's agency that deals with mothers and children needs to have a very strong component of women professionals throughout, including a stronger proportion of our top leadership. And so, but I'm pleased with the way the direction has gone. If my memory serves me correctly, ten years ago we were approximately 20%, or just under it.

It has also been, this past year has been a notable one in staff career

development and growth opportunities. For example, to date 19 general staff from headquarters in the field have been appointed to international posts. 12 of these 19 are from the New York office only, which is a significant achievement, and I hope this is a direction that we will continue to move on in the days and months ahead.

I also want to say that the tremendous increase that we've had in staff training and in staff training of relevance, we expect to continue, and in 1990 the approved training budget is expected to be 20% higher than in 1989. And I do urge all of the staff to think in terms of how they take advantage of the skills training that we can have inside UNICEF, because it's very clear that we as an agency are changing. If you went back to ten years ago, we were essentially a project support agency. We were a long, long way at that time from being an agency concerned with the rights of the children. This decade has seen us move tremendously into these broader fields. The past ten years have also seen us move from support of individual projects as our end objective, to really where what we are seeking is how to go to scale, how to achieve programmatic results for a whole country. And this is one reason why we have so much greater impact today than we did with our already good performance of ten years ago. But this does mean for all of us new skills, changing emphases, and we need to be conscious of it.

I'm also conscious that our terms of remuneration and conditions of service have, since I came to UNICEF, become less advantageous overall, relatively, absolutely. And I welcome the fact that there now seems to be a really major effort in process to achieve a significant strengthening of this, and as many of you know the Fifth Committee is now discussing the major study which if approved, would bring noticeable improvements in conditions of service, particularly - and this is where it's most needed - in the field. The improvements will definitely enhance our action in the field, and will facilitate recruitment and retention of high caliber staff. It will also enhance mobility in the field, and from the field, to Headquarters. But the climate seems to be favorable, and I'm really very hopeful that the Fifth Committee will come up with a step forward on this.

Well let me conclude this discussion where I opened. Yesterday was a very great day indeed. It was, as Victor described it in a phrase which I heard very usefully on national public radio, and myself then used for the rest of the day, the Magna Carta for children. And I really do believe it's a Magna Carta for children. But we of course are the ones who are going to have to make it truly meaningful. The first task is in the next two or three years to ensure that it is widely ratified. The first twenty are important, because the Convention doesn't come into effect until twenty countries have ratified it, and then it binds those twenty.

But, I do not believe that we can, for example, allow continuation of what has happened in the past where, for example, it took thirty years for the United States to ratify a convention on genocide. We must see in countries like the United States endorsement of the ratification of the convention at a far earlier date than that. How can we contribute to this process? And then, the next stage of course is, even if it is ratified, how do we make the convention really operational? How do those of us, for example, who are



concerned with health and education learn automatically to refer back to the key sections that relate to our work, so that gradually we build these rights as real rights that take on a substance and a life of their own. And it will take all of us in UNICEF to play a role in that.