

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1989-0042  
See also E/ICEF/1989/CRP.0029

Statement by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the opening of the  
Special Session of the Executive Board

New York  
18 December 1989



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Item # **CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1998-02168**

ExR/Code: **CF/EXD/SP/1989-0042**

Opening of Special Session of 1989 UNICEF Executive Board

Date Label Printed **18-Jan-2002**

cover + 8pp + 06

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1989-0042  
see also: E/ICEF/1989/CRP.0029

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/ICEF/1989/CRP.29  
18 December 1989

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND  
Executive Board  
Special session

Statement by Mr. James P. Grant

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

at the opening of the special session of the Executive Board

New York - 18 December 1989

Madam Chairman,  
Excellencies  
distinguished delegates:

I join our Chairman in greeting the Members of the Executive Board for this important special session. It is particularly a mark of the growing priority accorded to children that this special session, and the historic opportunity for children which it has been called to consider, has attracted such high-level representation of the Members of the Board, even despite the very unusual demands which this year's General Assembly has made upon the delegates. I therefore especially welcome the many distinguished Permanent Representatives and other Ambassadors present today, as well as their colleagues, and express my respect and admiration for the intensity of work in which you have all been engaged and must still address in the days ahead.

Madam Chairman,

You have called this special session to allow the Executive Board to consider the request made by the Governments of Canada, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Sweden that UNICEF provide secretariat support for the World Summit for Children which they have agreed to call for next September here at the United Nations. The basic plan for that historic meeting is detailed in E/ICEF/1989/15, with its Statement of Agreement by the six Initiating

Governments on the call for a World Summit for Children, and in which I report to the Board on the process which had led the six Governments to arrive at their decision to call the Summit, and on the implications and opportunities for UNICEF which this represents.

With your permission, Madam Chairman, I think it would be appropriate to let the six Governments speak for themselves in personally presenting their request to the Executive Board. They have asked Ambassador Yves Fortier, the Permanent Representative of Canada, to represent them. Ambassador Fortier is the only Permanent Representative here in New York who is also a Personal Representative of his Prime Minister for the purposes of the World Summit for Children.

[The Chairman will invite H.E. Mr. L. Yves Fortier to address the Board]

Madam Chairman,

I thank Ambassador Fortier for his very good presentation of the context of the plan of the six Initiating Governments, and their specific request to UNICEF. I would like to review briefly the opportunity which I believe this initiative offers to UNICEF and to all other organizations, institutions and individuals who are engaged in the work of building a better world for children.

The idea of a Summit for Children, of course, is not new to this Board. UNICEF first raised the idea as a question - "why not?" - in our State of the World's Children Report one year ago tomorrow. By the time of the regular session of the Executive Board in April, some twenty Heads of State or Government had already spoken in support of the idea. I reported on this in my Executive Director's Report and in my Opening Statement. The majority of speakers in the General Debate addressed the issue, the great majority of whom were supportive of the proposal. [A collection of excerpts from the General Debate is available in the back of the room.] At the time, we anticipated that, if a Summit were to come about, it would be both an independent initiative of one or several Governments, and that it would be hosted by one Government, with UNICEF serving only as an advocate and contributor to the preparatory process.

As the idea has evolved, it has, indeed, been taken up as an independent initiative of several Governments. However, rather than a host country location, they have proposed, as Ambassador Fortier related, to hold the Summit at United Nations Headquarters, and they have asked UNICEF to provide the secretariat for organizing the meeting. Responding to that request is our principal business today.

But, before taking up that administrative question, let's ask ourselves a more central question: "Why a world summit for children?". We have responded to that question in several documents which have been available to you,

including an Information Note under that title, as well as the two documents prepared for this Board session.

### Leadership = Results

Dealing with children at the summit level, while a relatively new phenomena, has well-demonstrated its unique and substantial usefulness. The two most dramatic examples are the annual summit conferences of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). SAARC pioneered the experience of children being placed on the substantive agenda of a summit meeting in 1986, and has returned to the subject each year since. The OAU followed suit in 1987, and also each year since. The magnitude of the contribution that these substantive considerations have produced can be measured in the tremendous increases in immunization levels in each region. Few, if any, development experts would have predicted in 1986 that either South Asia or Africa had any possibility of achieving the UCI-1990 goal. Today, that goal has been reached or is within reach for virtually every country in South Asia and for the majority in Africa. This progress has been achieved through a modest increase in external funding, and a massive increase in social mobilization - almost all of which stems from the commitment and engagement undertaken by the leaders of South Asia and Africa at their respective summits.

Madam Chairman, when the notion of a global summit for children was first discussed, I was conscious of much groundwork which had been laid over the years through the Child Survival and Development Revolution. I recalled Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, in 1982, telling me: 'Give us do-able propositions, Mr. Grant, and we will carry forward.' I recalled the monumental impact which emanated from a simple ceremony which UNICEF organized to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the United Nations in October 1985, when six Heads of State or Government joined with scores of NGO leaders and public personalities to sign a declaration of determination - "We the Peoples..." - to save succeeding generations of children from the scourge of preventable disease by achieving Universal Child Immunization by end-1990. The ripples from that commitment by President Kyprianou of Cyprus, then-President Vljakovic of Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Mulroney of Canada, then-Prime Minister Premadasa of Sri Lanka, the late Prime Minister Palme of Sweden, and then-Prime Minister Ozal of Turkey, continue to spread across the globe. And I recalled the immense value of the interest and support demonstrated by President Gorbachev and President Reagan when the only development issue they took up in their Moscow summit in 1988 was "reducing the scale of preventable childhood deaths through the most effective methods", and "they urged other countries and the international community to intensify efforts to achieve this goal".

Drawing on this experience, we put forward the idea. Frankly, I was not only pleased, but I was a bit overwhelmed, by the rapidity and strength of positive reaction and encouragement. Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar, Prime Minister Carlsson, President Mubarak, President Ershad, President Soeharto and President Mugabe were immediate in their encouragement. Many

more joined them over the months, either individually or in collective expressions, such as the resolutions adopted, first, by the Francophone Summit, and then by the OAU Summit, the Non-Aligned Summit, and the Commonwealth Summit. Parliaments spoke out, including the Australian Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. And many were the non-governmental voices, including the participants in the Paris Roundtable on Today's Children = Tomorrow's World and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in March before our Executive Board session, and later, the International Paediatric Congress and the World Council of Churches.

Finally, of course, there are those who took responsibility for converting a good idea into a plan of action: President Mubarak, President Salinas, President Traore, Prime Minister Bhutto, Prime Minister Carlsson and Prime Minister Mulroney - who was the first to offer specific financial support for a Summit, with a pace-setting pledge of C\$250,000 in June.

#### Why now?

Madam Chairman, one might well ask if this is really the right moment for a summit for children. Is this the moment that we can make the most of such a unique and historic opportunity?

I think the answer is definitely "Yes!". 1990 is truly an opportune moment for a new and stronger commitment to children. December 1990 is the target date for our goal of Universal Immunization, and the Summit itself will be a powerful impetus for those countries which may still be lagging to step up their efforts so that their leaders can come to New York in the fall and report their success. 1990 is the year that the United Nations will establish its strategy for the IVth Development Decade; it is the moment when the strongest voice is needed to ensure that the rightful and essential place of children in that strategy is firmly secured. 1990 is the year that countries will begin to respond to this Executive Board's and the WHA's enunciation of our goals for children in the decade of the 1990s.

We must certainly remember that, despite all the tremendous progress over the past half-decade, we still have:

- some 8,000 children dying each day for lack of immunization;
- some 7,000 children dying each day for lack of ORT;
- some 6,000 children dying each day for lack of antibiotics to combat acute respiratory infection;
- some 700 children blinded each day for lack of 10 cents worth of Vitamin A; and
- some 10,000 newly suffering goitre and other iodine deficiency diseases each day for lack of a few cents worth of iodine in their food.

Achievement of the WHO/UNICEF goals would mean that some 50 million children would not die in the 1990s who will die if present trends continue, and many millions more would not be blinded or disabled. But to achieve these

goals, we will need to move at more than twice the rate in the 1990s than we have been moving in the 1980s.

I am convinced, Madam Chairman, along with the Initiators and the many endorsers of this proposal, that a World Summit for Children, and the accelerated and expanded programme mobilization which can be stimulated by the Summit in every country, can produce much of the momentum to close that gap between our goals and our present reality.

I would also mention, in terms of the 1990 ideal timing of the Summit, that it clearly serves as a very positive impetus for many countries to move expeditiously forward in considering and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many Governments and NGOs have indicated that their goal will be to ensure that their countries have ratified the Convention in time for the Summit, with the hope that at least 20 countries have ratified, so that the Convention will already be entering into force by the time the leaders of the world sit down together to discuss how to give the promise of the Convention true meaning in the lives of children everywhere.

Finally, 1990 dawns as a decade of new hope and possibility. Major change is in progress in Eastern Europe and in many other parts of the world. Nations are receding from confrontation, and great powers seek new opportunities to collaborate with each other, rather than to confront each other. This is especially a moment of challenging opportunity for those who can put forward worthy propositions for constructive partnership among all nations. No opportunity is more worthy than to give our children - and, particularly, the children of the 1990s who will be the largest generation ever to share this earth - the opportunity of a decent chance in life.

#### Guidance by the Executive Board

Three particular questions have arisen in terms of UNICEF with respect to the Summit.

The first pertains to the role of this Executive Board, which the General Assembly has charged with responsibility for guiding international policy toward children in behalf of the United Nations system. The six Initiating Governments have made clear how strongly they value the leading advice of the UNICEF Executive Board as they develop preparations for the Summit. Certainly, the Board's multi-year process of establishing goals for the 1990s has set the context for the opportunity which the Summit can create and extend. The Board's determination this coming April of UNICEF's own strategies for the 1990s will surely set the pattern for the action plans associated with national preparations for the Summit and the Summit itself. The Board's review and comments on the draft Declaration of the Summit will offer valued guidance to the Planning Committee, with the Board serving as a preparatory committee-of-the whole in ensuring all interested countries an opportunity to contribute to the drafting. Finally, of course, the Initiators are hopeful that the Heads of State or Government of the 41 members of the Executive Board will appreciate their special responsibility, on behalf of the

international community, to personally participate in the Summit. Thus, the working core of the Summit meeting will surely be the members of the Executive Board.

#### Implications and opportunities for UNICEF

A second important question pertains to the impact of the Summit on the normal work of UNICEF - in the field, at Headquarters, and among our National Committees. There must be only one answer to this question: the Summit must - and, I am absolutely convinced, will - advance our programme delivery and resultant benefits for children. There is no doubt in my mind, nor in the minds of the scores of UNICEF Representatives and Government programme counterparts with whom we have consulted, that the impact of this initiative can only be measured in dramatically increased forward progress for children through accelerated and broadened delivery of programmes.

The Summit is not a special event or global event. It is not a distraction from on-going work. It is not a competitor for attention or resources. It is a tool for doing what we are doing infinitely more strongly, more effectively, and more rapidly. It is an opportunity to seize and to harness for forward movement within countries.

In each country with which UNICEF cooperates, the Summit is an opportunity to spur greater and more strategic attention to programmes and policies affecting children. It is a means for capturing the attention of national leadership, and those whose work is in support of national leaders. It is a means for attracting new allies, within government and in the non-governmental sector. And it is a means for offering new promise, and new expectations, to families and communities. We will instruct our field offices to use the Summit to the extent that it can help advance programme, such as they would seek to use any other opportunity that might be available.

For Headquarters, yes, there may well be some activities - particularly in the promotional/advocacy sector - to which we will accord lesser priority. But only because they were aimed at achieving the same objectives which we believe can be more effectively and more strongly achieved in relation to the Summit. But this is normal; it is something we do regularly. We keep our vision open to any new opportunities which may present themselves; we examine them; we make judgements on what can most effectively contribute to our goals and how we can most efficiently apply our resources.

For our National Committees, the Summit is likewise an opportunity. For those Committees which feel it can be relevant to advancing their programmes, or help to open doors which they have not yet been able to open, it is an opportunity which they can seize. For those which might feel that it is not relevant to their priorities, that is their decision to make. However, I can report that we have consulted with National Committees on this possibility, particularly at the National Committees Reunion last May, and through continuing bilateral contacts. They have been widely supportive from the start, and a recent survey shows that all the National Committees are quite

enthusiastic about the potential which the Summit offers to them. Most have already begun to consider how they can use it. Some have very specific plans in place and even already in motion. And several, as you are aware, have pledged or actually contributed significant funds to support the programme mobilization potential of the Summit. If the Executive Board approves UNICEF's involvement with the Summit, I plan to meet with the executive leaders of our National Committees in Geneva next month to discuss in detail how we can most effectively assist them in taking full advantage of this opportunity.

#### Financial implications

The third question is whether UNICEF's role in support of the Summit, and the mobilization activities which we propose to undertake to take full advantage of the Summit, will represent a financial drain or risk to UNICEF. I am confident that the answer to this question is "No". The letter of invitation which the Secretary-General intends to address to all Heads of State or Government specifically states that "The Initiators encourage voluntary contributions by Governments and non-governmental organizations toward the costs of the Summit and its related activities". Even before there has been any appeal for contributions, as we have reported, three Governments - one of an industrialized country, and two of developing countries - have pledged significant contributions over and above their traditional contributions to UNICEF, and I am told that other contributions are imminent. Likewise, four National Committees for UNICEF have already made pledges, and a majority of the Committees have indicated that they anticipate contributing. I have no doubt that this historic opportunity will generate a groundswell of financial support, not just to reimburse UNICEF for the costs of the meeting and the attendant mobilization activities, but extending far beyond to substantially increased governmental and private support for programmes for children. The financial authority which we request is only to allow our efforts to begin immediately, and on a scale which will ensure that the Summit meeting is properly prepared, and that we can take full advantage of these brief nine months to stimulate strengthened programme action.

#### An open moment in history

Madam Chairman, I mentioned before that this is a challenging moment for those who can put forward worthy propositions. I think that, indeed, this may well be the most important moment which we in UNICEF have experienced since that moment that the nations of the world agreed, albeit reluctantly, that healing the wounds of children affected by World War II wasn't the end of responsibility for children, but merely the beginning - and that, indeed, there was a whole world of children still in need of help. We have the potential in 1990 to secure for children a new and solid place firmly and high on the agenda of nations and those who would lead nations. It is an opportunity that, if missed, will not soon come again. It is, as one of our country Representatives described it, "a once in a UNICEF-lifetime chance".



All of us owe a deep debt of gratitude to three Presidents and three Prime Ministers - the Initiators of this project - for their vision and commitment in stepping forward to turn this seeming impossibility into a virtual reality. They have opened a door for history to march through.

\* \* \* \* \*

Madam Chairman, my colleagues and I look forward to the opportunity to respond to questions which members of the Board may have during this extremely important special session.