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Remarks by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the memorial service for
HENRY RICHARDSON LABOUISSSE

Church of the Holy Trinity
New York
2 April 1987



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Most of us who have gathered here today are here to remember an Executive Director of UNICEF. Some are here to remember a United States diplomat and Ambassador. And some are here simply to remember a friend.

I would like to remember a pioneer.

Harry Labouisse was one of the originals ... one of the first conceivers and practitioners of the art we call "development assistance". One of those who gave it life ... gave it purpose ... and gave it common sense. (He also, I might add, gave it two characteristics which we too-infrequently encounter in this business: good management, and personal grace.)

He began by helping in United States assistance to France as the War drew to a close, and later through the Marshall Plan. His first work in the still fledgling multilateral system came as director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. That assignment, surely, tested not only his good planning and management in helping people, but his diplomacy and resolve. He proved himself. He turned UNRWA into an agency that all parties accepted and trusted, despite their many disagreements. And in that, he helped to prove the tenet that is at the foundation of United Nations' efforts in humanitarian service: that people in need must be helped, regardless of politics.

Those of us who have worked over the years in United States foreign assistance can easily see the mark that Harry Labouisse left upon that process. The U.N. system is often spoken about as an "alphabet soup" of agencies. U.S. foreign assistance, too - before Harry. In the decade and one-half between 1946 and 1961, the United States had the ECA and then the MSA and the off-shoot TCA of the Point 4 Programme, and then we had the FOA followed by the ICA and its off-shoot, the DLF. Then came Harry...and the task force he led to give an enduring shape and a long-term development emphasis to U.S. economic assistance. His mark stands: last year, the United States Agency for International Development, which he designed, celebrated its 25th anniversary.

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He served in Greece, and then he came to UNICEF as its second Executive Director. He came to a UNICEF which had done well for children in its first two decades, but a UNICEF still widely regarded merely, if incorrectly, as "the do-gooders" - "those people who give milk to kids". If you will, a charity.

It was no longer "a charity" when Harry left it. It was a full-fledged active partner in development. And, again pioneering, it was an agency that had helped change the evolution of the art - from development "assistance" to development cooperation.

And throughout his service here, Harry Labouisse remained steadfast to that principle he helped pioneer in UNRWA: that politics are one thing, people in need, another. And children have no politics.

Those of us who knew him and worked with him over the years - as I have since 1961 - knew that he had very special gifts. Harry was a gentleman, an aristocrat, a humanitarian, a democrat and an egalitarian, all in the best sense of these terms. This combination of qualities may seem, at first glance, to be incompatible. But that was precisely Harry's gift to the world and to all of us. He did combine all these qualities. And he brought them to bear with a life-long purpose - in the cause of human development.

And if some may marvel and find it exceptional that such characteristics might have been blended together in one person, how special it is to rejoin that there has been not just one such person, but two - for Eve was always at his side, and always with equal strength and grace. The debt we owe to Harry is also a debt to Eve, for she shared him with us and added her own gifts as well.

There is a bit of prose which is known as the oath of the Athenians. It ends with the pledge that "...in all these ways, we will transmit this nation not only not less but greater, better, and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us." Harry Labouisse fulfilled that oath. But his nation was humanity.