

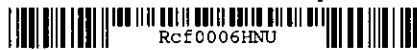
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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the opening of the
1987 Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York
20 April 1987



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UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1987 session

FOR INFORMATION

Statement by Mr. James P. Grant

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

at the Opening of the 1987 session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York - 20 April 1987

I join our Chairman in extending greetings and a warm welcome from me and my colleagues to the members of the Executive Board and observers, the representatives of UNICEF National Committees and non-governmental organizations, and other friends and colleagues.

I also wish to express particularly warm regards for our Chairman. A distinguished representative of his Government, with many demands on his time, he has nevertheless committed himself to the energetic fulfillment of his responsibilities as Chairman, making himself frequently available (and "doing his homework"!) in preparing for these sessions as well as in offering the Secretariat his counsel and his assistance throughout the year, including in leading the UNICEF delegation in this year's very useful meeting in Geneva of the Joint Committee on Health Policy. I know that his leadership during these two weeks will make a major contribution to the success of this meeting and continue the process of strengthening the dialogue between the UNICEF Secretariat and its Executive Board.

Governors ... and colleagues

Mr. Chairman, we often speak of the "mystique" and "unique" character of UNICEF. One of the unique characteristics, probably the one that gives

reality to all the others, is the nature of the Executive Board and its role in leading the organization. Those of us who are engaged in the daily work of UNICEF - I will not use the word "Secretariat" to describe us, because I also include our partners among the National Committees for UNICEF, including both professional staff and often full-time volunteers - do relate, need to relate, and want to relate to the Executive Board in many dimensions.

First, of course, you are our governors. You set the policies. You approve the budget. You authorize the staff. And, sometimes, you properly slap our hands for doing things you don't think we ought to be doing or for not doing things that we ought.

It is not this "authority" that makes you unique. It is, I think, the extraordinary degree of identification which so many of you have with the goals and everyday work of this organization. In part, this identification is because many of you are professionals in the fields of child health, education, sanitation, nutrition, medicine, and other areas of child, family and community well-being. And those of you who serve in more bureaucratic functions for your governments - and I use that word with utmost respect, appreciating that most of us are, in our own context, bureaucrats - you, too, have demonstrated over the years a remarkable commitment and determination not to restrict your attention to the workings of our organizational machinery and accounts, but also to come to grips - through travel, studies, and discourse - with the substance of our work. You are all thus colleagues and advisors, as well as governors. And thus, so much of what comes before you as proposals for decision is enlightened by your own work and often by your direct collaboration with UNICEF in this work.

These aspects of our relationship - as governors and as professional colleagues and partners in an on-going process of exploration and rethinking - together produce a special characteristic which we truly value. And it is why, I believe, that - to a higher degree than may often be the case - the concerns, ideas, and criticisms raised in the UNICEF Executive Board session and in our other discussions with you are taken very much to heart, and find their way - sometimes rapidly, sometimes slowly but nevertheless fundamentally - into the essence of what we do.

I can say this with confidence, because I have served in both capacities - as a member of the Board, and as a member of the Secretariat. In fact, this year's session marks my tenth year of deep involvement with UNICEF and with the Executive Board. It was in 1978 that I first led my country's delegation to this Board.

Ten years of adjusting, strengthening and moving forward

Much has been accomplished in these ten years. And it is with awareness of that progress that I have approached this session. In considering what I should say this morning, it seemed to me most useful to look at the longer-term context of our work, rather than to summarize again the specific issues before this Board, which are already so well developed and summarized

in the various substantive and administrative documents which have been submitted to you. I am also conscious that this past year has seen more dialogue between Board and Secretariat than in many previous years combined, through the ad hoc luncheon meetings held almost every 6 weeks, the "briefing and hearing" teams that visited most capitals which are not served by a UNICEF office, and the extensive series of informal meetings on substantive issues which will be held over the course of these two weeks.

In looking at our experience in a continuum of some 10 years, I recall from my first Executive Board session a general sense of positive impressions. But I also remember some significant concerns. In fact, I was fascinated the other day when I saw some notes that Dick Heyward had made after that 1978 session, inventorying "some concerns" expressed by the Board:

"Need for global targets"

"Need for more concentration of inputs"

"Need for indicators of UNICEF's output"

"Need for more long-term and rational planning [and] use of modern management methods"

"Need for review of budget by an outside authority"

"Need for an overall statement giving the 'whole picture'"

"Need to shorten and simplify documentation"

Looking back now, I believe we can all take satisfaction in the progress which has been made in responding to these Board concerns. In terms of global targets and concentration of inputs, we now have our Infant Mortality Rate criteria, and the priority focus on the Child Survival and Development Revolution, with its 1990 goals for universal child immunization and oral rehydration therapy to accelerate universal primary health care coverage. Our country programme commitments have lengthened from a 2-year average to a more than 4-year average. In terms of Board process, the ACABQ now provides the desirable "outside" review of the budget and other fiscal and administrative matters. Documentation for Board sessions has been drastically reduced from 3,419 pages in 1979 to 1,600 for even this biennium budget year. Our Medium Term Plan has been significantly improved over the last year, and now more clearly identifies our main programme thrusts and the underpinning of those within the different country contexts, through a broad range of inter-linked and supportive efforts. In terms of better stating our purpose, our State of the World's Children reports have eloquently articulated our perspective and our message to an ever wider audience, and have proved an unprecedented spur to governmental and non-governmental action, and our Annual Reports - the newest of which, just arrived from the printer, you have before you - more clearly and comprehensively document our organizational programmes and resources.

Expanding responsibilities ... increasing cost-effectiveness

I would suggest that there were five monumental developments in this past decade, which both gave force and reality to the evolution of UNICEF's work, and characterize many other areas of progress.

- I The Alma Ata Conference in 1978, at which UNICEF and WHO articulated in the health sector the basic services concept (which UNICEF had developed in the early 1970s) and gave "legitimacy" and momentum to Primary Health Care and the objective of Health for All by the year 2000.
- II The International Year of the Child in 1979, which projected UNICEF as the world's advocate for children everywhere, and established advocacy as a principal tool at UNICEF's disposal, which we have developed and improved to an extremely high degree; IYC also underscored for the first time the potential to advance our cause through close alliances with a wide range of other organizations and institutions which share common concerns.
- III The emergencies in Kampuchea and Africa - the public/governmental response to which confirmed evolution of the "new ethic" of society's responsibility to respond meaningfully in loud emergency situations - an ethic which was first manifested in the establishment of UNRRA and UNICEF in the mid-1940s.
- IV The reaffirmation of UNICEF's founding responsibility for children in especially difficult circumstances, an issue which the Board, and many of our National Committee and NGO partners, have firmly established as a renewed concern for UNICEF, particularly with regard to children in war situations; and we have been able to demonstrate the possibilities and potentials in protecting children as "zones of peace" and even, as in Central America, as a possible "bridge to peace", reminding differing factions of the interests which they have in common despite the interests which they may have in conflict.
- V Finally, and most massively, the "dark times" of the 1980s (which I described last year as the "Decade of Rude Awakenings") and UNICEF's positive response to adverse conditions. In most countries, "adjustment-with-growth" is the new word for "development". We all know that a boat in a storm can either sink or capture the winds and thrust forward. Just as the Great Depression of the 1930s gave rise to new initiatives in many countries in the field of social development, such as the New Deal in the United States, and World War II prompted the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions, UNICEF chose to respond to the adversity of the 1980s with:

-- significantly greater efficiency in UNICEF operations, as exemplified by:

- our Supply consolidation, which has enabled a doubling of throughput with 25 per cent fewer staff;

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- redeployment of staff from headquarters to the field, and particularly to Africa, which has seen a doubling of programme expenditures; over 80 per cent of UNICEF staff are now in the field as compared to a majority in headquarters locations 30 years ago;
- application of ACABQ expertise to the budget;
- introduction of biennium budget planning, now closely linked to programme priorities;
- the shift, as mentioned earlier, from 2-year to 4- and 5-year programme submissions
- a culture of cost-effectiveness which continues in our 1988-1989 budget proposals, as exemplified by the proposed 8 per cent reduction in core posts despite significantly increased expenditures - in fact, some 50 per cent higher than that of 5 years earlier; and
- significantly greater effectiveness in UNICEF-supported programmes for improving the well-being of small children and mothers, for example:
 - the IMR focus adopted by the Board in 1982, and the CSDR thrust approved in 1983 to operationalize the infant mortality reduction criteria, drawing upon the new potential offered through social mobilization, new/improved technologies, and an emphasis on maximizing benefit to improving health per unit of expenditure; these initiatives have, as you know, already taken hold dramatically in many countries, as manifested in the more than 3,000 child deaths which did not occur each day in 1986 as a result of accelerated immunization and oral rehydration programmes in recent years;
 - cost-effectiveness in water supply, in which in 1986 - for the third year running - the number of beneficiaries increased and cost per beneficiary was reduced in UNICEF-supported water programmes; and
 - UNICEF's international advocacy of adjustment with a human face, calling for:
 - greater attention to human needs and protection of vulnerable groups in the national process of economic adjustment in response to the "dark times" of the 1980s;
 - that the social sectors themselves need to adjust to become more effective, since adjustment is not just for industry, agriculture or transport;

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and this concept, too, has gained credence, as illustrated by the statement to ECOSOC last year by the Managing Director of the IMF and the paper on "Protecting the Poor in the Course of Adjustment" prepared by the World Bank for last week's meeting of the Development Committee.

The momentum continues

Mr. Chairman, the progress which we have made in just the last year in areas related to each of these fronts is well documented in the reports and presentations before the Executive Board. I will not elaborate on them. But there have been several encouraging developments in just the few months since those documents were prepared that I think are of importance to the Board's considerations. Most notable among these are:

- The Central American "Bridge to Peace" initiative moved dramatically forward on 5 April, with all seven countries and their Heads of State participating in an unprecedented multinational immunization day - which included the ninth "day of tranquillity" in El Salvador, a process which has already saved the lives or prevented the life-long crippling of more than 10,000 Salvadorian children since its initiation in February 1985.
- The 1987 World Health Day theme of universal immunization on 7 April stimulated not only the Central American initiative, but also major new accelerations elsewhere, including Benin, Bolivia, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kampuchea, Senegal and Zambia. Perhaps surprising to many is the fact that seven countries in Africa - with a total population of more than 100 million people - are now likely to reach this year (1987) the UCI-1990 goal, joining others, such as Turkey, which have already reached the goal, and still others, such as Thailand, which should also reach it this year.
- The release of UNICEF's special report on Children on the Front Line covering southern and South Africa and documenting the devastating impact on children of apartheid, destabilization and warfare in that region - a report which has already had a beneficial impact in strengthening the Secretary-General's March appeal for US\$244 million in support for Mozambique.
- With the leadership of our new Goodwill Ambassador, Harry Belafonte, our Symposium of African Artists and Intellectuals in Dakar in March launched UNICEF's first major effort to enlist the sustained participation of popular non-governmental leaders in developing countries for social mobilization for child survival and development, drawing on the long experience of popular figures in fundraising and advocacy in the industrialized countries.
- Recent indications of likely financial support for 1987, following the continuing solid and, in many countries, increasing support for UNICEF's work, and the positive completion of legislative action last year in

UNICEF's largest contributor, allow us to draw a larger measure of confidence for our income prospects than earlier anticipated. Though a devastating reduction in our largest contribution is again possible this year, we are somewhat more assured. It was that danger last year, as members of the Board are aware, that prompted us to "scramble" to undertake, with too-short a lead-time, the major fundraising and advocacy projects of Sport Aid and the First Earth Run. These projects, while of major benefit to UNICEF and (as Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar wrote last month) the United Nations as a whole, also had short-term costs which were exacerbated by the brief lead-time.

The next 5 years

Mr. Chairman, at our 40th Anniversary celebrations of last December and in the Executive Director's Report to this Board, I have referred to the impressive progress which has been made for children during these four decades: that each day in 1950, poverty, disease and ignorance claimed the lives of nearly 70,000 children under the age of five, but that, by 1980, that toll had been reduced to less than 43,000 children each day. By 1985, child mortality had been further reduced to an estimated 38,000 daily despite the global economic difficulties that have sharpened the misery of vulnerable children and mothers in so many countries.

We have thus seen that progress for children need not slow even in generally adverse conditions. If the momentum now underway can be sustained, it is possible that, five years hence, we should be able to look back in satisfaction in a world that has embraced a basic obligation of civilization - to do what can be done for our most vulnerable citizens - with:

- ... achievement of Universal Child Immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases, and awareness of oral rehydration therapy by the great majority of parents and use of ORT by most - with a significant strengthening of primary health care in the process toward the goals of Health for All by the year 2000;
- ... accelerated progress toward the worldwide goals of the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade, which will have been largely achieved in Asia and Latin America, with potable water thus within reach of the great majority of the world's children;
- ... significantly increased participation of women in the development process, particularly in education and food production, with a greater sharing of its benefits;
- ... a continuing evolution of the accelerated trends of recent years, reducing infant and child mortality to less than 30,000 per day, and slowing population growth as well;
- ... the emergence of social mobilization, which has been largely pioneered and developed in our efforts toward achievement of the 1990 goals for UCI and

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ORT, as a vital tool in the development process, applicable in many sectors, and notably put to work not only on such old challenges as illiteracy (particularly among women), but also on such new and urgent endeavours as the struggle to limit the spread of AIDS while science seeks a cure;

... codification of the world's obligation and commitment to its children through ratification of a Convention on the Rights of the Child;

... the principle of Children First applied far more in practice throughout the world, with the international community acknowledging that it is unnecessary and thus intolerable for so many of its young children to perish daily, and for millions more to be malnourished, blinded, brain-damaged and disabled in the "silent emergency" of infection and malnutrition.

None of these goals are beyond the reach of a world that is prepared to make a modest additional effort, continuing and building upon the efforts now in progress. The question by which we will be judged in the years ahead, just as UNICEF has been judged over the past 40 years, is whether we have made the best possible contribution - the most effective and most efficient use of our resources - toward reaching our goals.

I know that this Executive Board, in discussing the papers and proposals before it, and in probing the specifics and the details, will remain conscious of what UNICEF has achieved and can achieve if we use our resources to the full.

So now, Mr. Chairman, let's get on with the business of examining the plans for using those resources to sustain and further accelerate progress for children and mothers, while necessarily identifying the shortcomings from which we still suffer ... examining them ... and working out ways to do better.

That is how we will remain true to the legacy left us by those remarkable innovators and steadfast pioneers - Henry Labouisse, Danny Kaye and Helenka Pantaleoni - whom we honoured this morning.