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New York  
1 May 1987



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ENGLISH ONLY

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 closing of the 1987 session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York - 1 May 1987

Mr. Chairman,  
distinguished delegates:

Ten days ago, as we began this session, I called our attention to a series of concerns which had been expressed in the Executive Board ten years ago. On each of those concerns, I suggested that we had made considerable progress in this past decade. But on each of them, as well, I would be the first to insist that there is still room for improvement.

In these past 10 days, Mr. Chairman, I think we have added a good measure of further improvement.

We have considered the goals of our work, and you have made them clearer and more specific. The excellent recommendations from the Programme Committee after the review of the Medium Term Plan, Progress on CSDR, and our Priorities and Focus, are very helpful. We have looked at the way we plan and project our work, and you have proposed ways to plan more carefully, more completely, more soundly. We have considered alternative approaches on some management questions, and you have decided which ones we should follow. We have studied the views of outside observers, and you have determined which seem likely to improve our work, and which might not. And you have based your deliberations on briefer, clearer documentation, and also proposed how to make it even clearer in the future.

You have done all of this as the Executive Board of UNICEF - as our governors. But, you have also done it on the basis of your analysis of substantive issues as professional colleagues - colleagues of each other, and colleagues with those of us of the secretariat. And we have, I think, worked with you with the respect due our governors, as well as with the frank collegiality that should characterize a relationship between colleagues.

Mr. Chairman, we have just spent this afternoon summarizing and affirming the deliberations of the past two weeks. I don't think I need to offer another summary. Rather, I'd like to comment briefly on what may well be the most important development represented by this Board session - most important, at least in terms of the strength and competence of UNICEF and our ability to contribute significantly to improving the well-being of children. And on the overwhelming majority of issues we have seen significant steps towards synthesis and consensus in major programme and management areas, built on our joint ambition to achieve significant results and lasting sustainability in programmes and responsible management which combines wisdom and flexibility to rapidly address difficult situations and capture new opportunities.

I think that we achieved this not least because of energetic efforts by the Board and the secretariat to create and use new channels of communication and information through frequent informal consultations, hearings and briefings in capitals, and additional information-sharing in early mornings and lunchtime sessions during this Board. We have also moved decisively toward much more businesslike Board procedures, preparing recommendations and resolutions through hard work in often prolonged drafting sessions.

I said early on that we are not perfect. We make our best effort. In most cases, I think the members of the Board will agree, with respect to the preparations for this session and the development of the issues raised here, that our efforts were good enough. In some cases, they were not.

But surely the greatest benefit of the problems that have occurred is the lesson it teaches us, and reminds us, to do more, not less, in the year and years ahead, in engaging you in dialogue and in involving you in our work and preparing for your important deliberations.

I pledge that to you. We will do more, not less. That commitment is genuine; it is genuine because the advantages for UNICEF, and the resultant benefit for children, is so obvious.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Chairman, in a few minutes you will gavel this session to a close. Our marching orders are clear: to continue to try to do more, better, for the benefit of children. I spoke ten days ago of goals that perhaps might be achieved in the next five years. But the journey of a thousand miles, as we are often reminded, begins with a single step. Where will we be when we gather here again a year from now for the next Board session?

/...

Might the negotiators have reached agreement on a Convention on the Rights of the Child, and submitted it for ratification by their Governments?

Might up to 2,000,000 child deaths not have occurred, which would have occurred, were it not for accelerated immunization and oral rehydration programmes undertaken within the context of strengthening Primary Health Care?

How much worse, or better, may be the conditions of children in the Front Line states, and in South Africa itself? And throughout Africa?

How genuinely may nations have embraced the ideals of adjustment with a human face as they restructure their economies and budgets?

How many more wells may have been drilled - and, as importantly, how many more people taught how to obtain the real benefits of clean water through sanitary practices?

How much farther along, in collaborative action, may the nations of SAARC have moved for the benefit of children? And how many children, in how many countries, might be safer and healthier because politics and war gave way, at least briefly, for their protection, as the people of El Salvador have taught us is possible?

Mr. Chairman, there are so many areas in which dramatic progress can be made, in the coming year and the years beyond. And UNICEF's contribution to that progress will surely be stronger, more effective, as a result of your guidance at this session in these past two weeks.

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Mr. Chairman, for 40 years a great number of very good and caring people - and very talented people, at that - have worked tirelessly to build the UNICEF we know today. When we opened this session, we paused in tribute to three of the greatest, three heroes of UNICEF: two pioneering volunteers, Danny Kaye and Helenka Pantaleoni; and one incomparable staff member: my predecessor, Henry Labouisse.

Helen Keller reminded us, though, that "the world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker". As is our custom, I would like now to express our appreciation to several honest workers of UNICEF who have retired from our active ranks in the past year.

Last May, Luis Safont retired after 18 years with UNICEF; a national of the United States, Mr. Safont transferred to our Comptroller's Division from the U.N. in 1968. Frederick Wolff, also of the U.S., served 24 years as a procurement officer in New York and Copenhagen, retiring in June. The indomitable Jack Ling of China, so well known to many, joined UNICEF in 1951 and served in Bangkok, New York, Bangkok and New York, in posts from an assistant public relations officer to Director of the Information Division. He was seconded to WHO in June 1982 to serve as its Director of Information, and retired last July. Arne Jensen of Denmark joined UNICEF in 1965 and served as General Manager of UNIPAC and then, in New York, as the first

Director of the restructured Supply Division, retiring last August. September brought the retirement, after 10 years as a programme officer in Luanda and Dakar, of Almeri Bezerra de Mello of Brazil. And after 25 years, Suat Cobanoglu of Turkey retired in December, having served in Ankara, Abidjan, and Cairo prior to his final post, as Deputy Regional Director (Operations) in New Delhi. Sasono Satrio, a national of Indonesia and sister of our former Regional Director, Mrs. Titi Memet, also retired in December; she had joined UNICEF in Jakarta in 1967, transferring to Bombay as a programme officer since 1983. Eric D'Silva served UNICEF for three decades, joining in his native Bangladesh in 1956, and also serving in Jakarta, Manila, and finally as Senior Programme Officer in Bangkok until his retirement in December. Horst Ruttinger of the Federal Republic of Germany, whom I first met in Kampuchea in 1980, transferred to UNICEF/Kampala from UNRWA in 1964, and continued in Transport and Supply in Abidjan and then New York, returning to Africa as Special Assistant/Emergency Programmes and Logistics in Addis Ababa until his retirement, also in December. Robert Walwer of the United States joined UNICEF's Greeting Card Operation in 1977, and continued in Geneva until his retirement in March, having served as Director of GCO/Geneva and then as Senior Fundraising Officer. Our final retiree - and the longest in service - is Pandurang Rajguru of India, who joined UNICEF in New Delhi in 1950, serving as both a National Officer and International Professional, variously as an accountant, finance and administrative officer, finance officer and deputy chief of finance, in New Delhi, Lagos and New York.

Our greatest hope, of course, is always that the farewells we say are really "thanks for your full-time service, and now we count on you to continue as volunteers, friends and supporters". It is sadder when farewell is said as a friend is laid to rest, like Harry, Danny and Helenka. But it is saddest of all, and terribly wrong, when we must say farewell to a colleague whose life ended not only while still in service, but because of that service. That does not happen often, but tragically, it happened this past December, as UNICEF lost its [miraculously] first staff member on duty in Lebanon. Nabila Breir, a Lebanese national, had served nearly three years with UNICEF Beirut, and held the post of Project Coordinator for Palestinian Mothers and Children. On December 18th, on her way to work, she was pulled from a taxi shared with others, and killed.

Nabila Breir was one of 48 UNICEF staff members, led by Raymond Naimy, who continue to work in Lebanon, whether rushing emergency assistance to those who have just escaped the fighting, or building playgrounds to try to give a semblance of normal childhood to children for whom "normal" is a nightmare. They are making the best possible use of UNICEF's \$7.5 million annual input, coming from General Resources, Australia, Austria, The Federal Republic of Germany, The United States and AGFUND. They are a rainbow of people from varying religious, cultural and political backgrounds, who share the common cause which we share with them: to help children.

Mr. Chairman, you opened this session ten days ago by asking for a minute of silence in tribute to our heroes. I would ask that we now, again, pause momentarily in silence - controlling our emotion that a colleague should lose her life while she worked to protect children in the most especially difficult of circumstances, and praying that all our colleagues who endanger themselves by struggling to lessen the danger for children, might themselves be protected, might endure and might triumph.

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that the silence of this assembly will be heard throughout our organization and by all our staff, and that it will remind all of us how important it is to separate the silence of what need not be said from the silence of what cannot be said. I want to dedicate both what is said in these closing moments of the 1987 Board session and our silence, to Nabila Breir and to her husband and to their child, and through their child to all children who may not understand our analyses, our debate and our paperwork during the last two weeks, but who surely understand the work that we now will return to with new vigour generated by your support.

It may well be that in the years ahead we will again have to pause in tribute to others who will give their lives for children. Today, UNICEF staff are at work in more than a score of countries which are torn by warfare.

Surely, always, we will hold in our hearts our tributes for those thousands who, through UNICEF, live their lives for children. They are all heroes, moving the world forward by mighty shoves and tiny pushes.

Together - you, the members of the Board; we, the secretariat who work with you here; and they, the UNICEF people on the front lines for children everywhere - together, we create a mighty shove. And the world is moved forward ... for its children.

We should be proud of what we do. We must never cease to try to do better.