

Subj Chron: CF/EXD/SP/1987-0022

Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the Commencement Ceremonies of
Clark University

Worcester, Massachusetts
17 May 1987

"A Decade of Rude Awakenings: The New Frontiers"



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



RcF0006H00

Item # CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1998-02024

ExR/Code: CF/EXD/SP/1987-0022

Decade of Rude Awakening: New Frontier. Address by Mr. Jar
Date Label Printed 12-Dec-2001

cover + bpp + 06



United Nations Children's Fund Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia
Детскому фонду Объединенных Наций 联合国儿童基金会 منظمة الأمم المتحدة للأطفال

Chron Subj: CF/EXD/SP/1987-0022

Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at Commencement ceremonies of
Clark University

Worcester, Massachusetts - 17 May 1987

"A Decade of Rude Awakenings: The New Frontier"

President Traina,
distinguished guests,
parents, and most important,
members of the 1987 graduating class:

Thank you for both the kind words and for the honorary degree from this distinguished University. Clark has contributed remarkably over the years to frontiers in the liberal arts and sciences. It is a particular privilege to be among you as the University commemorates a century of service. I share a sense of the history of this place with you, and a sense of preparing here for participation in the world at large. It is almost exactly a half-century since I was first on this campus; in August, 1937, I came as a young refugee from the Japanese occupation in July of Beijing, China - my birthplace and home town. For the next year, I lived with an old Worcester family on the site of the first settlement in Worcester - 548 Lincoln Street - now the Sheraton Lincoln - and attended North High School.

Clark University graduates have entered into war years ... into boom years - most notably the 1950s and 1960s ... depressions ... and now, today, into prospectively troubled times.

As you begin to take your place in the world at large, you are each rightly seeking satisfaction in life, and the difficulties of these times will surely have some effect on you. But this is your era of history, and you also have a responsibility: it is you who must help the world navigate through the troubled waters that lie ahead.

2844G

cover + 6pp + 06

A decade of rude awakenings

The troubled times that will meet this class of graduates have, unfortunately, developed largely in the few years during which you have received your college and secondary education. A severe turn in global economic tides has reversed decades of increasing prosperity that the world has enjoyed since the Second World War. It is, in fact, quite possible that the 1980s will be remembered as "the decade of rude awakenings". More fundamental change is being forced upon more institutions - whether governments, corporations, or international organizations - than perhaps at any other time in recent history. Even the seemingly most secure and stable have been compelled to relinquish previously held expectations of invulnerability and adjust to new realities. Countries - from the United States and United Kingdom to Mexico and Brazil to Nigeria and Tanzania to the U.S.S.R. and China - have been forced to massively alter their assumptions. Even the most stable-appearing corporate institutions have been challenged to restructure or disappear - and often both: this applies to great banks, such as Continental Illinois and the Bank of America; broadcasting conglomerates, such as CBS; industrial manufacturers, such as International Harvester, Caterpillar, John Deere, and Chrysler, and the world's most fabled airlines, Pan Am, Eastern Airlines, and People Express. In these few short years, American farmers and energy producers - both of which depend on primary products - have been threatened by the lowest commodity prices in modern times.

The United States has been spared the worst, so far. Yet the rudest awakenings for the U.S. may yet lie ahead, as you are entering your professional careers. Our relative national prosperity of the past 5 years, so different from most of the world, as we know, has been made possible not only by more than doubling the national debt, but also by massive borrowing from abroad. Since you entered college, the United States has shifted from being the world's largest creditor nation in history, to the world's largest debtor. Earlier this month, when \$30 billion in 30-year Treasury bonds were offered to the public - to pay, among other things, salaries of American soldiers and sailors and research grants to universities - Japan alone bought nearly one half of those bonds. Since this massive dependence on foreign borrowings cannot long continue, a rude awakening for the United States almost certainly lies ahead during the next several years.

Most of you, I am sure, have an inner confidence that this is a temporary situation. After all, hasn't your lifetime and that of your parents been one of steady growth, with Americans in a principal leadership role? We have watched the gross global output of the world more than treble in the last forty years - in fact, almost quadruple. We have witnessed the end of imperialism as it was fifty years ago when I first walked this campus, and consequently, the number of nations of the world increase from 50 to 180. We have seen the number of Americans living in absolute poverty massively reduced in the last 20 years.

But I think we all will agree we have less confidence about the immediate future than we had even when you first entered into your higher education. And you now bear the responsibility for providing leadership.

There is another world I would like to speak of which is in a permanent - not a temporary - emergency ... and which, too, requires your leadership. It consists of one quarter of the world's people - more than a billion people - equal in population to that of all the industrial countries. They are in such absolute poverty and have such lack of access to even the most rudimentary services of education and health that one out of every four of their children die within a few years of birth. We call their situation the "silent emergency" because these children die in such numbers, and quietly. Two years ago the world's newspapers headlined the terrible news from Bhopal, India, where nearly 3,000 died in the Union Carbide chemical disaster. That same day 38,000 small children died, silently and without public notice, from the conjunction of gross poverty and under-development - lack of clean water, basic education and even the most rudimentary of health facilities. That occurs every day of the year. If these 38,000 small children were born in the United States, 35,000 of them would not die today. The difference is where they were born, even in this era which, in the words of Arnold Toynbee, is the first in human history in which it is possible to bring the benefits of progress to all - rather than, as in the past, to only a privileged minority.

You may properly ask today - this morning at this Commencement - what is the common set of ties, if any, between these two sets of problems - the unsettled world that you are entering and the abject condition of this world's poorest quarter?

There are two principal links. First is the tie of common sense. We know the world today is ever smaller and more interdependent. When I first arrived in Worcester, it took two weeks to reach the U.S. from China by boat, and another four days to cross this continent by train. Even then a conflict starting in far off China could ultimately engulf us in a world war. Now I get on an airplane, as I will in June, and 15 hours later I will have travelled from New York to Beijing. We now know that when there is gross disparity in a remote country such as South Africa that it can lead to massive upheaval that affects us deeply over here. Again there is the social justice aspect. How can we really feel comfortable in this planetary village when expenditures on our cigarettes - or our alcohol - alone in the United States are sufficient to end the hunger of so many millions?

But there is a second major, and in many ways more fundamental common tie between our problems here in this country and problems elsewhere. Both people elsewhere and we face, for the duration of this century, the new challenge of how to get more progress from the least use of resources. How do we - including you in this graduating class - cheat the destiny of the past?

More with less

What do I mean by more from less?

What the world has gone through in the last four decades is a tremendous boom based upon the use of more and more of nature's bounty, its energy, the fertility of its soil, its water and air, its animals and fish. It is only in

the last few years that it has become clear that there will not continue to be this endless bounty of nature unless we manage it more carefully. We discovered that with heavy use of fertilizer and pesticides on the land, the Great Lakes of North America became contaminated. After trebling the world fish catch in 25 years, over-harvesting led to a drop in the world catch, and the rate of growth in the fish catch has never returned. When we put too many cars in the cities without exhaust controls we had problems with the environment. We have yet to face up to acid rain resulting from fossil fuels.

So, clearly, the challenge in this society is how to make better use of what we have. The laws of nature that point out the path toward meeting this challenge are equally true with regard to our own health. For example, increasing the life expectancy of the average American male by a single year using curative measures such as high-technology medical advances, medicines, hospital facilities and so forth would require increased expenditures of many billions of dollars annually, according to estimates by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. Yet the life expectancy of that same man could be increased by 10 years through four simple self-health measures that actually consume less and save money: by not smoking, eating less with a better diet, drinking alcohol in moderation, and getting adequate exercise. But a person has to first know what to do, based on social research and experience, and secondly, he or she must actually do it. Sometimes it takes help from our friends to accomplish both: to develop and share the knowledge, and to provide the group support to make it happen.

This is evident in current public response to such issues as smoking, driving under the influence of alcohol, and AIDS. The tremendous societal support in terms of education, media attention, and peer pressure against drunken driving has had a major impact on individuals' adopting what are essentially self-health measures. In the face of the global AIDS pandemic, application of social mobilization methods to change our sexual and health practices is currently the only course of action. For rich people and poor, pending development of a vaccine, prevention through universal health education is the only means of containing AIDS - and could reduce the threat by two thirds or more. But will we? How many tens of millions will die unnecessarily?

A very similar need to accomplish more with less, and a potential for people to help each other do so through combining low-cost/high-impact techniques with social mobilization, links us of the industrialized nations with the world's poorest billion people. Every year, 14 million young children die. Over half of them die either from six diseases which can now be prevented by 50 cents worth of vaccines, or from the dehydration associated with diarrhoea, for which life-saving and extremely low-cost "Oral Rehydration Therapy" has been available since the early 1970s. In fact, we could say by 1985 that never before in history had there been, first, so much knowledge available for improving the health of children, and second, such a gap between knowledge and its use. Mobilizing people to actively participate in meeting their own human and health-care needs in both developing and developed countries is unleashing a formidable reserve of previously untapped resources.

Just as we are seeing the beginnings of a breakthrough in the United States on smoking, which has been the cause of the premature death of 1,000 Americans each day, we are seeing the beginnings of an even more dramatic breakthrough in the developing world toward immunizing children against the six diseases which, in the early 1980s, were taking the lives of 4.5 million children every year. This has been the result not only of scientific advancements of recent years which have, for example, produced new vaccines for measles and made them progressively more heat-stable and therefore less dependent on costly and difficult-to-maintain cold-chains. More importantly, this has been made possible by our learning how to capture the newly available channels of communication in developing countries to convince parents to bring their children in three times as required for effective immunization. Pioneered in Colombia in 1984, this involves use of marketing techniques well known to corporations such as Coca Cola and politicians such as Michael Dukakis: thousands of TV and radio spots, presidents and religious leaders personally vaccinating children, sermons from every pulpit, use of schools and teachers and voluntary organizations such as the Scouts and Rotarians. Through the revolutionary combination of these technological and communication advancements, we have been able to reduce the toll of young lives in the developing world from 14,000 daily to 10,000 daily, with prospects of further massive reductions by 1990. We are already saving the lives of more than one million children annually, and we hope to increase this to three million by 1990.

The challenges

Two key challenges in the next 20 years in which many of you will be called on to participate, both in the developing world and here, are: first, to identify and develop low-cost/high-impact methods to get more from proportionately less cost, such as with new vaccines for malaria and AIDS, and, second, to master the will-power to implement these improvements. It is one's will that ends a smoking habit, and it is group will - popular and political will - that holds the potential of compelling societies to end such unacceptable conditions as massive child deaths that are readily preventable, and the all-too-recent societal environment that encouraged all to smoke.

The urgent goals which you face are surely less obvious and more refined than past challenges: to make more of less ... to avoid war rather than to win it ... to conquer diseases rather than nations ... to plant crops on rugged mountainsides or on ocean floors rather than flags on distant planets ... to draw energy from the sun and waves and garbage, despite the fact that there may not be much of a personal profit in that.

Perhaps most exciting to me is that I am here today among people who can be the heroes of this new world. And I know that your parents and teachers who are sharing this proud moment with you also share my hope and my expectation of what you have to offer.

From this university have come individuals who have made renowned discoveries: Michelson in the study of light, the rocket work of Goddard,

Hoagland and Pincus in oral contraception. And even now, work at Clark in the studies of environmental hazards are defining the horizon of our knowledge and capacity in that field. Clark University has pioneered major strides in geography and resource management on an international scale, and admirably with an intensive focus on problems particular to the Third World.

Perhaps among you today is the woman who will help develop the new genetic grain breakthroughs that will permit nitrogen fixation and greater pest resistance in plants which will do away with the need for fertilizers and pesticides, thereby abetting the environment and helping the poor.

Or perhaps among you today is the man who will show the world how to conquer the great neglected diseases which affect the poor of the developing world - malaria, schistosomiasis, or river blindness, to name a few.

You graduates are truly the elite and privileged of the world. You might ask, "Who me"? Yes, you. As you leave this institution with the precious possession of your education, you enter the upper two and one half per cent of the world's population in terms of knowledge, and the Americans among you enter the elite top 10 percent of citizenry in the the world's most powerful country. Most of you from abroad come from already influential families. Taking these two factors together, you are in the world's upper one per cent of power. Our challenge is to use our limited but tremendous resources more effectively and to assure that at least a modicum of social justice is achieved. The real issue is not our capacity to cope, but our willingness to try. Your success could make your generation the most satisfying in history.

My congratulations and my best wishes go with you...and may you "let there be light - "FIAT LUX" - wherever you go.