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Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
Twelfth National Conference of the Bangladesh Medical Association

Sent from New York
28 August 1987



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UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017
CABLE ADDRESS: UNICEF - TELEPHONE: (212) 754-1234

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28 August 1987

Dear Dr. Begum,

Thank you for inviting me to send a message, which I am now enclosing, addressing the Twelfth National Conference of the Bangladesh Medical Association.

With best wishes for the success of your important conference.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James P. Grant".

James P. Grant
Executive Director

Dr. Syeda Firoza Begum
Bangladesh Medical Association
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15/2 Topkhana Road
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BANGLADESH

Enclosure

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On behalf of UNICEF I am pleased to address the Bangladesh Medical Association on this auspicious day of the start of its Twelfth National Conference. All of your members belong to a most prestigious segment of Bangladesh society, but at the same time, one which has the heavy responsibility of providing health care for the entire population. Which brings us to why UNICEF considers you as major partners in its endeavours to improve the lives of children.

UNICEF has been in this country since early 1952, as partners with the government and the medical profession in the improvement of lives of children. Its initial programmes included assistance to the national BCG and small pox vaccination campaigns.

In the 1980s, we have accelerated our efforts to promote the survival and development of young children under the leadership of your government. This joint effort is making a difference in saving the lives of countless children dying from dehydration caused by diarrhea, or illnesses preventable by immunization.

Your country's leadership in research in diarrheal disease control has resulted in mortality and morbidity reductions especially among young children, not only in Bangladesh but also worldwide.

And although 7 million households are already familiar with treating diarrheal diseases with oral rehydration therapy, there are still thousands of children who are dying needlessly through dehydration. Therefore, we need your continued active support leadership to involve everyone in reinforcing this simple method for diarrhea management.

Together with government and your help, we hope to immunize 80% of all mothers of child bearing age against tetanus and all children under two against the six major killers. Measles, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough and tuberculosis are responsible for 30% of all childhood deaths in Bangladesh. Tetanus kills many mothers as well as accounting for 42% of neonatal deaths.

Particularly impressive is the leadership role of younger government medical officers in the efforts to reach UCI 1990. It is now critical that all private practice, as well as, government physicians join these efforts to ensure that every child is protected.

With your help, we shall endeavour to improve child nutrition, including the control of vitamin A deficiency which each year impairs the vision of several hundred thousand more and makes them particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases.

I commend you and your country's efforts on adopting a national drug policy in 1982, thereby focussing on the quality rather than quantity of drugs. The lead taken by your country in this regard has become a shining example for other developing countries to follow. As a result of this drug policy there has been an increase in local production of essential drugs for primary health care, and the cost of drugs is going down.



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Since maternal mortality rate in Bangladesh is one of the world's highest, all health personnel, including doctors need to provide the best possible pre-natal care and delivery practices, not only to reduce deaths among mothers, but also to ensure that healthier babies are born.

You are the most respected technical opinion leaders in this regard, the ones whose advice on low-cost life saving methods and ordinary, sound health care will be listened to by mothers, fathers, community leaders, and decision-makers. Thus your role is crucial in bringing about this revolution in child survival and development.

Let us continue to work together towards the health and well-being of the Bangladeshi children and mothers.