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Welcoming Comments by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
International Forum on Environment and Development

New York
19 October 1987



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I would like to extend a most wholehearted welcome to all of you as you share the use of UNICEF's new "environment". When Mr. Karim Ahmed asked me to say a few words to this group, he very aptly said, "...It seems entirely appropriate to hold a Forum on 'Our Common Future' in the House which places the future of children in the forefront".

There are strong linkages between the theme of this forum and the work of UNICEF. UNICEF welcomes the approach taken in the Brundtland report, an approach which is both visionary and practical, far-reaching and immediate. UNICEF concurs with the report that poverty "pollutes the environment". We acknowledge the sad reality that, as the report states, "Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive". Not only is people-focussed economic growth compatible with protecting the environment, but in many developing countries, accelerated development may be essential to overcoming some of the causes of environmental degradation.

UNICEF applauds the emphasis in the Brundtland report on decentralized, participatory approaches to achieving sustainable development. UNICEF's own experience shows that actions which are community-level in focus, low in cost, and human-scale in technology, can be extremely high in effect, widespread in impact and gentle to the environment. We see this in the child survival and development revolution now rapidly emerging in so many countries. Low-cost programmes such as those for immunization, diarrhoeal disease control, birth spacing and promotion of breast-feeding will not only so improve the health of children as to save the lives of some 2 million children this year, but will also contribute significantly to changing attitudes towards the numbers of children desired by families, and contribute, surprising as it may seem to many, toward slowing population growth. This is because when people who receive services also participate in delivering them, an interesting dynamic occurs: peoples' attitudes change. We believe it is through knowledge gained by participation, and through changing peoples' attitudes, that environmentally sustainable development becomes feasible.

The "World Conservation Strategy", produced in 1980, stated, "We have not inherited the earth from our fathers; we have borrowed it from our children". The safekeeping of this precious global home which we have been "loaned" is a serious charge. In the deliberations of this forum, let us channel the formidable human resources present in this room: the combined sensitivity to the environment and knowledge of what the earth needs, into actions which will transform the highest vision of this group into reality - for the children - and the future - of the world. As the Executive Director of UNICEF, I wish you all success in your important deliberations.

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