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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Opening Meeting of the First Regular Session
of the
UNICEF Executive Board

New York
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I am delighted -- indeed, honoured -- to open this First Regular Session of the newly-constituted Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund. Although we have already met informally, I want to take the occasion of this first formal meeting to congratulate each and every one of the 36 countries elected to serve on our Board. In particular, I want to welcome Azerbaijan, whose first-time election to the Board symbolizes the new era -- the post-Cold War era -- in which we are living. Warm greetings, too, to all the Observer delegations.

Before going on, please permit me a personal note. As you may recall, last year's meeting of the Executive Board was quite an emotional one for me. Let me use this opportunity to thank all of you for the outpouring of support and the countless get-well wishes that helped so much with my recovery and the clean bill of health from my doctors. I feel great and ready to tackle the future with verve. So again, thank you for your kindness and concern.

We meet under the sign of change within the United Nations, and all of us are determined to make it change for the better. It is our fondest hope that the revitalization of UN activities in the economic and social fields -- envisaged in General Assembly Resolution 48/162 -- will bear fruit, not in six months or a year, or two years or three, but starting now, today when the need is so great and the potential for doing so much good... for so many... so quickly, has never been greater. Now, while the momentum of progress is tangible and measurable in so much of the world. The structural changes that have been made and those that may lie ahead are clearly not ends in themselves, welcome as they may be; ultimately, these changes of structure and process must translate into effective policy guidance, common goals and strategies that work -- in short, into substantive improvement in the way the different components of the System work together to promote human development and, in our case, the well-being of the world's children.

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That is why the UNICEF Secretariat welcomes wholeheartedly resolution 48/162 and believes that its effective implementation can lead to a stronger, more effective UNICEF. Your Executive Director and Secretariat are at your disposal in this regard.

The changes brought about by Resolution 48/162 must aim at building on UNICEF's foundation of solid achievement. Implementation of this and other relevant resolutions must facilitate UNICEF's operational effectiveness for which, I am happy to say, we have a sound reputation in the UN system. Can we do more? Can we do better? No question about it, and that is why, as we begin our important deliberations today, I ask you to carefully review, if necessary modify, but certainly approve our revised proposal for the Administrative and Management Review of UNICEF which the Board has mandated. A more efficient, cost-effective and operationally strong UNICEF is what we all want.

As eager as your Secretariat is to share our thoughts with you, we are interested much more in hearing yours, with an open mind. We welcome the opportunity to have more frequent dialogue with the Executive Board; it will promote greater transparency and understanding of UNICEF's role and activities, particularly in the field. It will provide new opportunities for clear guidance by the Board to the Secretariat. We hope it will promote an even stronger partnership among all of us for children. However, we should not allow the increase in the number of regular sessions of the Board to lead, inadvertently, to micromanagement.

We welcome the commitment to the revitalization of ECOSOC and its new role vis-a-vis the Executive Board; we welcome the various moves toward greater coherence in policy formulation and system-wide goal-setting; we are enthusiastic about the evolution toward Common UN Premises in the field, about the Country Strategy Note and the enhanced coordination and collaboration among development partners the drafting of such a document must engender. We are actively working on all these fronts. Both Gus Speth and Nafis Sadik spoke positively last week of the results flowing from the recent meeting of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) in Bangladesh, under UNICEF chairmanship and the first JCGP meeting ever held in the field. We seek your guidance on how to push these vital processes forward, while losing none of UNICEF's unique profile and taking utmost advantage of its comparative advantages.

UNICEF's greatest strength resides in the existence of a Grand Alliance for Children, a movement bringing together governments and civic society, officialdom and grassroots, leaders and ordinary people around the globe. There can be no question, then, that we must ensure their continued broad collaboration and participation in our work -- not only non-member States, but also UNICEF's National Committees, NGOs and other strategic partners in the

growing movement for children. Their effective participation, their ongoing input and enthusiasm, are critical to this organization's future.

This Board's effectiveness will depend, of course, on the substantive participation of its members from the industrialized world and its members from the developing world. Nothing can substitute for the active, informed, critical and engaged participation of North and South alike.

This brings me to the issue of the Bureau. In the past, the Secretariat has benefitted from its nine-member Bureau which had good regional representation from donors and recipients. Some such mechanism should continue to prove useful.

In listing the functions of the Executive Board, Resolution 48/162 encourages the taking of "new programme initiatives". We welcome this innovating, renovating spirit. I assure you that this is the spirit in which UNICEF works when we work best -- planning, testing, implementing, learning from mistakes and from others, changing and growing. Openness to change and renewal is part of what makes UNICEF a good development partner.

But, frankly speaking, our successes also stem from persistence -- sticking with what really works -- and making sure it works in as many places and for as many communities as possible. Help us change, then, where change is needed; but I also ask you to continue helping your Secretariat to do what works. And in this connection, I ask you to consider the implications of the remarkable human progress reported in our new annual publication, "Progress of Nations". I ask you to consider the implications of the World Bank's recent analysis -- in the 1993 World Development report -- describing our basic package for child survival as the most cost-effective, highest-yielding set of interventions for sustainable human development.

Doing all this, distinguished delegates and colleagues, doing all this while accelerating our efforts to meet the mid-decade and year 2000 goals for children, and responding as best we can to the proliferation of emergencies around the globe, is, in fact, the great challenge facing us -- Board and Secretariat -- in the coming years.

In addition to our dialogue on these issues of structure and process, we have on our agenda three important programme-related items, plus the Management Study proposal. I will now address them briefly:

* **First, the Maurice Pate Award.** I, with the endorsement of the Bureau of the last Executive Board, recommend that it be given, this year, to the All-China Women's Federation, in recognition of its exemplary leadership in promoting the well-

being of children and women on a nationwide scale. This remarkable organization has done -- and is doing -- so much toward achievement of the goals for children and development in the 1990s. I call your attention to document **E/ICEF/1994/P/L.1.**

* **Second, the Emergency Programme Fund.** As you know, UNICEF assistance has been called for in an increasing number of emergencies, many of them complex emergencies, in recent years. In 1992, we provided emergency assistance in 54 countries -- last year, the number rose to 64. Our spending on emergencies increased four-fold over the past four years: from \$49 million in 1990 to \$212 million in 1993, from under 10 per cent of UNICEF's programme expenditures in 1990 to 28 per cent in 1993. To date, the Emergency Programme Fund has been used effectively as a cash flow mechanism. But with the increased scale of our emergency programmes, and based on our experience during 1992-1993, it is clear that the size of our EPF is too small, even with the ability to call on CERF resources. We are asking you to increase the planning level of the EPF from \$14 million to \$30 million for the 1994-1995 biennium. This will make for a more efficient, rapid, and flexible UNICEF response to emergencies. Detailed explanation of the reasons for this recommendation can be found in document **E/ICEF/1994/P/L.2.**

* **Third, an item on the new arrangements for inter-agency action on HIV/AIDS** has been added to the agenda. UNICEF is working closely with UNDP, the World Bank, UNFPA, UNESCO and WHO on the establishment of a Joint and Cosponsored UN Programme on HIV/AIDS. The recent WHO Executive Board passed a resolution in support of the effort. Inter-agency discussions have been underway for the past year and are continuing, to identify operational steps that can be taken to improve collaboration among UN agencies in this important area. UNICEF is actively participating in these discussions and currently serves as **Chair of the Inter-agency Advisory Group on AIDS** within the UN system. A note can be prepared to inform our deliberations on this item at an upcoming Executive Board meeting.

* Finally, as noted earlier, we ask the Board to approve our revised proposal for the Administrative and Management Review of UNICEF mandated by the Executive Board, and which is contained in document **E/ICEF/1994/AB/L.1.** I am confident that you will find that this new proposal incorporates the valuable comments made at the 1993 regular session of the Board. It also takes into account -- as the Board requested -- the restructuring and revitalization of the UN in the economic and social fields, as well as the follow-up to the Multi-Donor Evaluation of UNICEF. We are ready to get the study underway as soon as it is approved, in order to finalize it by the end

of 1994. A number of measures have already been taken in this direction. It is my fervent hope that the study will enable us to take actions that will ensure that we have the appropriate management and administrative capacity to best implement UNICEF's mandate.

And so we have -- Board and Secretariat -- our work cut out for us over these next few days. As I said at the outset of my remarks, we meet under the sign of change. But I should add, under the sign of **progress**, as well. The political will and practical momentum generated by the World Summit for Children were reinforced and expanded by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, whose Agenda 21 embraced all the World Summit goals for children and women in a broader framework of action for sustainable development. The World Conference on Human Rights highlighted the centrality of human rights to the development process, and called for universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by 1995. The upcoming UN conferences on population and development, on women, and, in particular, the World Summit for Social Development, should provide a common framework and give a decisive push to global action on the social and economic fronts for the rest of the century and beyond. Our efforts for children are central to making progress on all these fronts.

Our potential for contributing meaningfully to these global conferences is encouragingly supported by a whole series of events that have occurred since the Board last met. These are outlined in the two informal **Key Developments** papers you will find at the back the hall. It suffices to say at this moment that in these past ten months, ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child have increased from 135 to 155 countries; there has been encouraging action toward the mid-decade goals, as evidenced by the mini-summit held on the third anniversary of the World Summit for Children, and the recent WHO-UNICEF Joint Committee on Health Policy review of progress toward reaching these important targets. Their achievement by December 1995 would mean that 2 million fewer children will die in 1996 than died in 1992, and we will have virtually eliminated the leading causes of blindness and mental retardation among children.

A critical issue in the months ahead, of course, will be the extent of the donor response to the encouraging actions of so many developing countries, and how to use the intimacy and new processes of this Board to strengthen our partnership.

As we face the future, we can take encouragement from all that has been accomplished by past UNICEF Executive Boards. Executive Board and Secretariat have worked closely and well together. Together we have achieved substantial progress for the children and women of the world, particularly in the developing countries. Together, Board and Secretariat have made possible what is, I

believe, UNICEF's central achievement: helping remove the aura of inevitability that has surrounded the mass deaths and disabling of young children from time immemorial. We have helped governments and communities save and improve the lives of hundreds of millions of children. Slowly but significantly, scores of governments are moving from a policy of low priority for their vulnerable children towards a policy of **children first**.

In the process, UNICEF -- Board and Secretariat together -- has helped build consensus around a new model of development, one that places children -- and human beings -- at the heart of the development process. Together, Board and Secretariat have won substantial legitimacy for the concept that meeting children's basic needs will help accelerate solutions to the main problems that vex and threaten humankind on the threshold of the 21st century -- the problems of poverty, overpopulation, and environmental degradation that feed off of one another in a downward spiral that brings instability and strife in its wake. We have discovered an extraordinary lever for global progress, and its name is children.

As Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said at the mini-summit commemorating the third anniversary of the World Summit for Children: "Of all the subjects of development, none has the acceptance, or the power to mobilize, as does the cause of children. Our children are our future."

What we do here this week -- what Board and Secretariat do together in coming months and years -- is, therefore, of momentous significance.

I know we will all rise to the challenge. Thank you.