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Responses from Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to  
Interview with Newsletter Association Francois-Xavier Bagnoud

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JPG responses to interview with newsletter of the Association  
Francois-Xavier Bagnoud

1. How would you characterize the progress being made on the  
Convention on the Rights of the Child?

There's been considerable progress. To date, 155 countries  
have ratified the Convention, making it the most nearly universal  
of all human rights treaties. Only 35 countries are left that  
haven't embraced it. We are hoping that by the end of 1995 all  
countries will have ratified, as called for by the World  
Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, June 1993). At the same  
time, ratification will only be meaningful if the principles and  
provisions of the Convention are reflected faithfully in the  
laws, policies, practices and culture of governments, civic  
society and families everywhere. That's a longer process, but we  
have already taken a major step toward a new ethic that puts  
children first.

2. What are the 3 most important actions that NGOs can do to  
encourage government action on the Convention?

1) In the 35 countries that have not ratified the Convention  
NGOs should press for speedy ratification -- no later than end  
1995.

2) Where the Convention has been ratified, NGOs should work  
with governments to ensure that the laws of the land are fully in  
accordance with its precepts.

3) In every society there needs to be more public discussion  
of ways to protect and advance "the best interests of the child,"  
in the words of the Convention. NGOs can promote such  
constructive dialogue on furthering the civil, political, social,  
economic and cultural rights of children and youth.

3. What can NGOs do themselves to promote the rights of the  
child?

There is no end to what NGOs can do, depending on their area  
of action, membership and outlook. One priority is to work for  
peace and understanding, tolerance and diversity -- as a way of  
counteracting the centrifugal forces that are pulling the social  
fabric apart in many parts of the world. Another is to help  
narrow the gap between rich and poor -- within societies and  
between countries. We don't want to replace the East-West  
conflict with a North-South conflict. Third, I'd suggest  
building a global movement to meet basic human needs by the year  
2000, starting with children. This can alleviate poverty, help  
slow the population explosion, ease stress on the environment,  
strengthen the status of women and shore up new democracies.

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4. What is UNICEF doing on the HIV/AIDS front?

In many parts of the world, AIDS is likely to be one of the main factors working against the achievement and sustainability of the World Summit for Children goals. Since young people are at the centre of the pandemic, it is essential that they are also at the centre of solutions. UNICEF is promoting a broad social strategy that empowers young people to adopt healthy lifestyles and responsible sexual and reproductive behaviour. Also, UNICEF and WHO are finalizing a major review of the direct and indirect impact of HIV/AIDS on children, with an eye toward identifying sustainable means of strengthening the coping mechanisms and support structures of individuals, families and communities affected by AIDS. Finally, 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. UNICEF is actively participating in these discussions and currently serves as **Chair of the Inter-agency Advisory Group on AIDS** within the UN system.