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Statement from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
delivered by Ms. Teresa Albanez, Special Advisor
at the
Global Conference on Sustainable Development
of Small Island Developing States

Barbados
26 April 1994

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**"Small Islands, Big Human Issues:
Commitment to Children in Small Island Developing States"**

I am delighted and honoured to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of Mr. James P. Grant, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Mr. Grant deeply regrets not being able to make this statement in person; UNICEF's Executive Board meeting got underway in New York yesterday. He asked me to thank Prime Minister Erskine Sandiford and the entire government of Barbados for hosting this major event; and Mr. Nitin Desai, Secretary-General of the Conference, for the kind invitation to make a statement. He also asked me to convey his cordial greetings to all the delegates who have gathered here on this important occasion.

The Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) constitutes a significant landmark of this decade in the succession of global conferences to mobilize international efforts to overcome some of the most serious problems threatening humankind on the threshold of the 21st century: the downward spiral of mutually-reinforcing absolute poverty, rapid population growth and environmental degradation.

The 1990 World Summit for Children was the first milestone. With the end of the Cold War, the first truly global summit meeting brought together more heads of state and government than ever before and produced consensus on a set of principles and strategies, and agreement on an action plan to meet 27 health, nutrition, education, gender and rights' goals by the year 2000. Achievement of these goals would, in effect, overcome most of the worst aspects of absolute poverty for children, give a boost to economies, slow population growth, ease stress on the environment, strengthen democracy and improve women's status.

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The second milestone was the 1992 Earth Summit, which focussed global attention on the need to address the downward spiral of poverty, overpopulation and environmental degradation in a holistic fashion. We at UNICEF were most gratified that Agenda 21, the dynamic blueprint for action that came out of the Rio meeting, included all of the goals that had been set at the World Summit for Children. It also asked governments to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This was in recognition of the fact that pursuing today's low-cost opportunities to protect the health, nutrition and education of children and women in the developing countries is one of the most immediately available and affordable ways of weakening the grip of poverty, population growth and environmental deterioration. Interestingly enough, the goals for children are the part of Agenda 21 that is the farthest along in terms of global follow-up.

This Conference builds on the momentum generated by the two previous gatherings and applies the world's new thinking to specific concerns that affect small island states. UNICEF strongly welcomes the opportunities and challenges posed by this Conference and we are confident that the insights gained here will, in turn, make valuable contributions towards the International Conference on Population and Development later this year, as well as the Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Social Development next year -- to all of which UNICEF, as a part of the UN family, is deeply committed.

Small Islands, Big Human Issues: The Challenge in SIDS

UNICEF has long experience in development cooperation with SIDS and close ties of solidarity with their peoples. This allows me to draw your attention to issues confronting two basic groups of island states that are of particular concern to us. We are aware of the great diversity that exists among the states that are represented in this Conference. Any generalization runs the risk of being an over-simplification. However, our experience in cooperation in 31 such states permits us to make certain observations concerning their sustainable development.

A first group is made up of about a quarter of the island countries where the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, as you know, are particularly acute. These conditions are wreaking havoc on the lives of children, women and indeed the population at large. Economic activities in these poor island countries are limited mainly to subsistence agriculture, fisheries and cash-cropping. Tourism is a main source of foreign exchange. Most of these countries are heavily dependent on external aid and remittances from abroad. Although a majority of the population lives in the countryside, the number of people in urban centres is growing rapidly, due mainly to rural-to-urban migration. Isolation

imposed by distance and poor communication continues to pose problems.

Under these circumstances, the mortality rates of infants, children under five, and mothers are relatively high -- as you can see in the table of key indicators attached to the distribution copy of my remarks. The main causes of death and illness in children are acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, complications of birth and prematurity, and malnutrition. Inadequate water supply and poor sanitation remain a serious problem and are contributing factors to the high incidence of diarrhoeal and other diseases. Malaria is an endemic problem in many of these countries. Malnutrition, diet-related disorders and food insecurity are becoming increasingly serious.

The social environment in these countries is changing rapidly. The extended family is under stress, with some family members remaining in the countryside and others moving to cities. Isolation and alienation are particularly severe in urban areas, where there tends to be little community or neighbourhood identity.

But significant progress has been made in a number of the poorest small island countries in the Pacific as well as in Asia and Africa. Maldives is a particularly good example of how political will at the highest levels can contribute to making spectacular gains in child survival and other areas of human development, even at low levels of per capita GNP.

The second group of small island developing states are those that fall into the middle- and high-income brackets. In most of them, significant resources were made available in those countries for social programmes in the immediate post-colonial era, when the welfare model was still current, and aid packages were tied to independence treaties. Over the past 30 years, successive governments have worked hard to maintain and increase levels of well-being. In that context, low infant mortality rates and universal primary education were achieved.

Our host country, Barbados, is an excellent example. In the 1993 Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Programme, Barbados is ranked number one in human development in the developing world. Its population has achieved levels of human development comparable to those of many industrial countries -- in life expectancy, child mortality, among other indicators.

But, as you know, the context in which this group of better-off SIDS are operating has now changed, or is changing, dramatically.

Many gains in social development in countries like Barbados,

Fiji or Mauritius are threatened by vulnerability to changes in economic and trade policy in their major partner countries, or by natural disasters and environmental factors -- threats over which they have little control. Their small economic base does not give them reserves to cushion shocks from these factors, and positive trends can be reversed in a short period of time.

The challenge to SIDS in this category is, therefore, to protect past gains by adopting sustainable models for health care that reach those most in need and are affordable; by addressing issues such as quality and relevance of education, and by providing young people with technical as well as social skills so as to mitigate the effects of changing family structures and community environments. This represents a challenge to UNICEF and other bilateral and multilateral partners as well, as we seek new forms and areas of cooperation in line with new realities.

In those SIDS where meeting basic needs is no longer the number one problem... where the goal is not merely child survival but quality of life... we must increasingly turn our attention to other problems -- some of them relatively new -- that threaten to undermine past gains and block further progress. We must work harder for child development -- with emphasis on the most vulnerable and formative early years -- so that each child is able to fulfill his or her potential. Children's rights to protection and participation need to be respected. All youths -- boys and girls -- should learn responsible sexual behaviour and practice healthy lifestyles. They need to acquire better parenting skills. Education must be improved and made more relevant so that youth feel that staying in school is worthwhile, instead of dropping out and looking for work.

In this world where women continue to be discriminated against... where violence is on the rise... where racial, ethnic and religious intolerance is tearing apart the social fabric... where the environment is being depleted and assaulted -- children and young people must be taught gender equality; they must learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully; tolerance and respect of diversity must be an essential part of their upbringing; and environmental awareness and activism need to be promoted starting from childhood. UNICEF welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with SIDS in the search for solutions to these and other problems.

Investing in sustainable human development

It is clear that development will not be sustainable unless economic growth is accompanied by equity, and investments are made to achieve all of the basic human goals for health, nutrition, education and family planning, as agreed upon at the 1990 World Summit for Children. Such investments are powerful and affordable

levers for promoting economic progress, stabilizing populations, and easing environmental pressures.

To date, governments of 13 island states have drawn up national programmes of action (NPAs) for reaching the goals. Another 12 are in the final stages of drawing up such plans. To the extent that they are decentralized and incorporated into national development plans and budgets, NPAs can spearhead a new kind of social policy that integrates national and local planning, with a high degree of community participation.

To accelerate efforts to achieve the year 2000 goals for children, most countries have also agreed to reach a limited number of the most practical and affordable goals by the end of 1995. These mid-decade targets include the elimination of neonatal tetanus; a 95% reduction in measles deaths; a use rate of 80% for oral rehydration against diarrhoea; the promotion of breastfeeding in hospitals and maternity units; the elimination of guinea worm disease; the eradication of polio in selected countries and regions; and the achievement of 80% immunization levels in all countries that have not yet reached that goal. Clearly, these goals will apply to some countries more than others; where targets have already been reached, countries are setting their sights achieving higher goals ahead of schedule.

Commitment to Children in SIDS

We at UNICEF feel that the follow-up programme flowing out of this Global Conference should be clearly based on priorities for human development that strengthen each country's capacity to combat the worst consequences of poverty while reducing vulnerability to global economic shifts, environmental disasters and social alienation. And we believe that children and women can serve as a cutting edge of the new development paradigm that is emerging from the series of global conferences in the 1990s.

Toward this end, UNICEF has several concrete suggestions:

*** First, the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be ratified by all States.** It became international law in 1990 and represents an ethical breakthrough of enormous importance. In essence, it turns children's basic needs into rights and says that these needs must be given a "first call" on society's resources. I am to happy to report that 25 island states have already become States Parties to the Convention. We feel strongly that the Barbados Declaration and Plan of Action should take note of this progress and urge the remaining island states to ratify the Convention without delay. The landmark World Conference on Human Rights, held last year in Vienna, called for universal ratification of the Convention by 1995, and we hope this Conference will add its

endorsement. Globally, only 33 countries have yet to ratify. If the goal is achieved, the Convention will be the first truly universal law in history. But ratification, of course, is only the first step; increasingly, our focus must be on implementation of the Convention. In this connection, it is important to recall that each State Party must report on its compliance to the Committee on the Rights of the Child two years following ratification.

*** Secondly, all the SIDS should have national programmes of action up and running.** As I mentioned earlier, NPAs have been prepared in 13 of the small island developing states and are nearing completion in 12 others. It is our hope that NPAs will be completed in all the SIDS and rapidly decentralized and implemented, so that planning and action can be coordinated at both the national and local level. I can think of no better way to measure compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child than by monitoring progress toward achievement of the goals reflected in the NPAs. In fact, the Committee on the Rights of the Child is looking at each country's NPA as a yardstick for assessing compliance with provisions relating to children's social and economic rights contained in that global "Bill of Rights" that is the Convention.

*** Thirdly, we urge you to give particular support to primary environmental care (PEC).** It is a new concept that is being developed to empower communities to meet their basic needs while preserving the local environment. Children and youth can be each community's environmental conscience, activists capable of mobilizing their own families and neighbourhoods in actions -- large or small -- that can make a real difference, especially where the land is small and its riches are scarce. UNICEF and other agencies have just helped an NGO to issue a marvelous book, entitled "Rescue Mission Planet Earth" that shows how much young people can do to save the planet and keep it human.

*** Fourth, we would like to emphasize the need for a grand alliance of all stakeholders in the pursuit of sustainable human development.** A global partnership of government, civil society, NGOs, scientific and business communities, and international agencies is needed to take joint and coordinated action. The comparative advantage of each must be harnessed in a framework of social mobilization for holistic action.

*** Finally, something we call "20/20 vision".** The critical importance of new resources for human development is, of course, obvious to everyone here. Together with UNDP, UNICEF estimates that 20% of international development assistance and 20% of government spending needs to be devoted to nutrition, primary health care, basic education, safe water supply and

family planning, in order to satisfy the most basic needs among the poor over the 1990s. But only half as much -- on average -- is currently allocated for these priority areas. And yet we know from the experience of the fast-growing Asian economies, among others, that expenditures on children's and women's essential needs are among the wisest, highest yield investments that can be made -- a precondition for sustainable human development. Therefore, we urge that the "20/20 vision" concept be incorporated into this Conference's appeal for additional resources for sustainable human development in the SIDS.

UNICEF believes that no global social agenda will meet the test of time if it does not recognize the extent to which children and women are a powerful lever for progress in all areas of development.

We have reached a critical juncture in history and can make a quantum leap of human progress. The SIDS are playing a vital and positive role; they deserve greater support from the international community. This Conference represents an important opportunity and we must not allow it to slip through our fingers.

Once again, we warmly thank you all for this opportunity to share our views and concerns.

SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES/LESS POPULOUS COUNTRIES

	ORT use rate 1989-92		% children reaching grade 5 1986-92		% using family planning 1981-92		Female literacy as % of male 1970-90		% of 1-year-old children immunized against measles 1992		Population (thousands)		Annual no. of births (thousands)		Annual no. of under-5 deaths (thousands)		Under-5 mortality rate 1992		GNP per capita (\$) 1992		% of under-5 children under-weight 1976-90		Total fertility rate 1992		Maternal mortality rate 1980-91	
	All	Girls	All	Girls	1981-92	1970-90	1992	Total	Under	1992	16	1992	1992	1992	1992	1992	1992	1992	1992	1992	1992	1976-90	1992	1992	1980-91	
Antigua & Barbuda	50	..	..	..	39	..	87	66	30	1.1	0.0	25	4870	10	1.9	..	..							
Bahamas	54	100	100	..	..	..	93	264	81	5.2	0.2	29	12020	..	2.0	69	..						
Bahrain	73	78	81	..	54	69	87	533	199	14.1	0.2	16	7130	..	3.8	34	..									
Barbados	15	80	83	..	..	99	90	259	67	4.1	0.0	12	6530	5	1.8	27	..							
Belize	65	68	66	..	47	91	72	198	87	7.2	0.4	52	2210	..	4.8	19	..									
British Virgin Islands	..	..	..	..	..	98	99	17	..	0.3	0.0	..	8500	..	..	..	..					
Brunei Darussalam	..	74	72	..	..	69	99	270	96	6.5	0.1	10	20760	..	3.1	..	..							
Cape Verde	5	60	60	..	15	..	82	384	176	13.8	0.8	60	850	19	4.3	107	..									
Comoros	70	29	31	..	..	40	32	585	297	28.7	3.7	130	510	..	7.1	500	..							
Cook Islands	8	..	..	..	50	..	87	17	..	0.4	0.0	28	1550	..	3.5	46	..						
Cyprus	4	81	83	..	..	91	74	716	195	12.3	0.1	11	9820	..	2.3	..	..							
Djibouti	56	38	34	..	49	..	83	467	222	21.9	3.5	158	1210	23	6.6	740	..									
Dominica	50	100	95	..	..	94	98	72	27	1.5	0.0	22	2520	4	3.0	58	..							
Equatorial Guinea	40	..	..	..	..	37	66	369	166	16.2	3.0	182	330	..	5.9	430	..					
Fiji	16	87	84	..	32	74	91	739	291	17.6	0.5	29	2010	..	3.0	90	..									
Gambia	48	50	38	..	..	16	83	908	420	40.3	8.8	220	390	..	6.1	1500	..							
Grenada	70	..	..	..	54	98	73	91	34	2.2	0.1	35	2310	..	3.1	100	..						
Guyana	15	97	99	..	..	96	76	808	281	20.7	1.3	65	330	22	2.6	200	..							
Iceland	85	90	92	..	28	..	99	260	68	4.5	0.0	7	23670	..	2.2	0	..									
Kiribati	..	..	..	..	..	..	77	74	30	2.4	0.2	81	700	..	4.3	10	..			
Luxembourg	..	99	100	..	..	..	80	378	70	4.7	0.1	11	35260	..	1.6	0	..						
Maldives	27	..	..	..	..	91	98	227	106	8.8	0.7	78	500	..	6.2	400	..					
Mali	..	100	99	..	..	86	80	359	88	5.5	0.1	11	7280	..	2.1	0	..							
Marshall Islands	..	..	..	..	27	..	86	49	..	1.4	0.1	92	..	..	7.2	109	..			
Micronesia, Fed. States	..	..	..	..	..	..	88	109	49	3.7	0.4	29	..	..	4.8	83	..	
Montserrat	..	..	..	..	53	97	100	11	4	0.2	0.0	15	3330	..	2.5	..	..							
Palau	..	..	..	..	38	..	94	16	..	0.5	0.0	35	790	..	4.2	..	..							
Qatar	20	56	60	..	32	72	79	453	141	10.4	0.3	33	16240	..	4.4	9	..									
Saint Kitts and Nevis	5	88	88	..	41	98	98	42	13	0.8	0.0	42	3990	..	2.7	150	..									
Saint Lucia	75	96	95	..	47	82	97	137	63	3.8	0.1	21	2900	14	3.3	26	..									
Saint Vincent / Grenadines	98	..	..	..	58	96	100	109	39	2.4	0.1	25	1990	..	2.6	13	..						
Samoa	50	..	..	..	21	..	91	158	67	5.2	0.3	58	940	..	4.7	400	..						
Sao Tome and Principe	50	88	87	..	10	42	61	124	49	4.5	0.4	85	370	17	5.1	79	..									
Seychelles	88	93	..	..	..	60	92	72	26	1.6	0.0	20	5480	6	2.9	60	..						
Solomon Islands	60	88	..	..	25	..	74	342	163	12.9	0.4	34	710	..	5.4	10	..							
Suriname	..	99	100	..	..	95	84	438	157	11.4	0.4	35	3700	..	2.7	89	..							
Swaziland	85	76	78	..	21	65	85	792	367	29.6	3.2	107	1080	10	5.0	110	..									
Tonga	30	84	75	..	39	96	90	97	40	2.9	0.1	25	1350	..	4.1	37	..									
Turks and Caicos Islands	..	..	..	..	..	98	59	13	..	0.2	0.0	31	780	..	..	..	..					
Tuvalu	..	69	61	..	..	..	63	12	..	..	0.0	56	650	..	..	460	..		
Vanuatu	66	61	60	..	15	48	74	157	70	6.0	0.5	85	1220	20	5.7	107	..									

* Range \$676 - \$2686