



File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0044

Address by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Third Meeting of CEOs of Humanitarian and Development NGOs  
"Youth for Lasting Peace  
NGO and Children at the Cutting Edge of Progress in Our Time"

Geneva, Switzerland  
27 May 1994

	UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label
	Ref000725M
<b>Item # CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01179</b>	
<b>ExR/Code: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0044</b>	
CEOs of Humanitarian and Development NGOs. Youth for Last:	
<i>Date Label Printed 24-Sep-2002</i>	

cover + 9 pp + ø b



United Nations Children's Fund Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia  
Детский Фонд Организация Объединенных Наций 联合国儿童基金会 منظمة الأمم المتحدة للطفولة

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0044

Address by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Third Meeting of CEOs of Humanitarian and Development NGOs

Geneva - 27 May 1994

**"Youth for Lasting Peace  
NGOs and Children at the Cutting Edge of Progress in Our Time"**

I am truly happy and greatly honoured to be able to address this gathering of distinguished leaders of humanitarian and development NGOs. This is the third in a series of extremely useful and productive meetings. The first, ably chaired by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and held on 28 May 1990, was specifically aimed at influencing the outcome of the World Summit for Children -- and, as you know, the Declaration and Plan of Action that emerged from that first-ever global summit not only contain many of the concrete points that you suggested, but underscore to an unprecedented degree the centrality of NGOs and grassroots participation in efforts to improve children's lives and for development in general.

The second meeting -- again graciously hosted by our Red Cross/Red Crescent friends and held on 1 October 1991 with even wider NGO participation -- identified a series of avenues for NGO action in support of the goals set at the World Summit for Children. The meeting led, I am happy to report, to broader involvement and more focused action by NGOs in World Summit follow-up.

This meeting, chaired by our respected friend Mr. Jacques Moreillon, Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, is addressing the urgent issue of youth's contribution to lasting peace, in the context of our ongoing efforts to build a better world for all children.

**The context of change**

In order to discuss the contribution of youth to lasting peace, I think it is important to understand the context in which we are functioning. And in order to understand the context in which we are functioning, we have to look at some of the extraordinary changes that have taken place over the past 50 years.

FINAL

cover + 9pp + 0/b

When the United Nations and UNICEF were established nearly half a century ago, it was still a world of empires. Even India was still a colony. Voices for women's rights were barely audible -- the women's movement had not yet been born in its contemporary incarnation. Racism was flagrant -- Martin Luther King had not yet even started to make his mark. Apartheid was just being institutionalized as a State system. Hundreds of millions still accepted the concept that authoritarianism was a necessary transition stage to freedom from want. Environment, including population pressure, was not yet an issue.

Today we live in an entirely different world. We expect vastly more from development because it is now seen as an integral part of a vastly greater revolution made possible by the technological advances of the past century -- advances which led the British historian Arnold Toynbee to say that:

"Our age is the first generation since the dawn of history in which mankind dared to believe it practical to make the benefits of civilization available to the whole human race."

#### **The tectonic shift**

In essence, thanks to this change in capacity, the world is undergoing a tectonic shift. From historical acceptance of the notion that people exist to serve their State and its elite -- that under conditions of scarcity, the vast majority must labour to support the privileges of a few -- we are gradually, painfully, zig-zaggingly and bravely moving toward universal acceptance of the idea that the State exists to serve people and communities. Development, therefore, must be responsive to this new construct. And development will be responsive to this new construct only, I regret to say, if NGOs and private individuals once again lead the way as they have at almost every historic shift in the past. As Martin Luther King said: "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step toward the goal of justice requires suffering and the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

What does this mean for us? Development, if it is to be sustainable today, must not only be sustainable in the environmental sense -- protecting nature and conserving scarce resources while promoting increased output -- but it also must break the grip of poverty on the bottom half or third of society and slow population growth, while sustaining democracy, human rights and people's participation in the development process. Let me state this differently: if the pattern of development is not supportive of democracy, if it does not contribute significantly to overcoming mass poverty, to slowing the population explosion and preserving the environment, it is not sustainable. A development pattern that produces growth with 15 per cent unemployment,

impoverishment of a third of the population, population growth rates of 3 per cent, a degraded environment and effective sidelining of people and communities from the decisions that affect their lives -- is not sustainable.

This is really a far cry from the general perspective on development that prevailed when UNICEF was founded.

### **Children at the heart of global change**

We are also seeing this tectonic shift in relation to the world's future -- its children. When UNICEF was established, children were still a highly marginalized part of society, with limited rights only in a handful of countries, and staggering death tolls -- some 75 thousand per day. An indication of how much things have changed since then is the statement made last September by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali at the UN Roundtable celebrating the 3rd anniversary of the World Summit for Children:

"Of all subjects of development -- he said -- none has the acceptance, or the power to mobilize, as does the cause of children. Our children are our future."

The global effort we called the Child Survival and Development Revolution starting in the early 1980s, has saved some 25 million young lives and spared hundreds of millions more from lives of disability and thwarted potential. Today, many of the traditional enemies of children are on the run -- vaccine-preventable diseases, malnutrition, ignorance, legally-sanctioned discrimination and neglect, among others. As a result of the largest peacetime collaboration in history, the world is now immunizing some 80 per cent of its children, some 110 million infants, on four to five occasions before their first birthday. Vaccines and oral rehydration therapy against diarrhoea are now saving five million lives a year.

The encouraging results of the Child Survival and Development Revolution and the end of the Cold War made possible the World Summit for Children. As you know, it 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 concrete 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 the world's children.

Then we saw all of these goals incorporated wholesale into the Earth Summit's action plan, Agenda 21. Interestingly enough, there has been more specific follow-up on the goals for children than on any action plan emerging from any other summit in memory. The goals for children are the part of Agenda 21 that's the furthest along.

## **The Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The World Summit goals and timeline are being used by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as a yardstick to assess countries' compliance with the relevant provisions relating to children's social and economic rights contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child -- that global "Bill of Rights" for children that entered into force in 1990 and, in record time, has been ratified by 159 countries. No other human rights treaty has received so many ratifications, and we are hoping that, by the end of 1995 -- with your help -- it will become the first universal law of humankind.

In essence, the Convention turns the basic needs of children -- all children -- into rights, and spells out the obligations of the State, the family and society to respect and fulfill them. For the first time in history, the world is in the process of agreeing on minimum standards for nurturing the young.

As you know, there is another category of critically important rights enshrined in the Convention -- I am thinking of the provisions that protect children from exploitation and abuse. Now that the vast majority of nations have embraced the Convention, how do we judge a country's compliance in the field of child labour or child prostitution, for example, for which the international community has not adopted convenient targets and timelines? Passing and enforcing the necessary laws and regulations is obviously an essential part of what needs to happen, but eliminating such social evils is a complex undertaking that cannot be accomplished overnight in any society. But at the same time, if States Parties do not start moving seriously on this front, they open themselves to criticism for failing to comply with the relevant provisions of the Convention. What I am suggesting, then, is that we urge countries where such problems are serious to develop national plans and timelines for compliance. Enforcement can be phased in over a realistic but not overly-long timeframe. For example, a country might set itself the goal of getting all children 12 years old and under out of the workplace and into the schoolroom by the year 2000, starting with six year olds in 1995, seven year olds in 1996, and so on until achieving the goal in the year 2000. Clearly, NGOs can play a major role in accelerating such breakthroughs for children and society.

### **Morality marches with changing capacity**

What all of this means is that global morality is changing, struggling to catch up with our new capacity to extend the basic benefits of progress to all. Morality marches with changing capacity. As author and holocaust survivor Primo Levi wrote:

"If you can relieve torment and do not, you join the ranks of the tormentors."

In this period in which economic planning is out of fashion, over 125 countries have issued or drafted National Programmes of Action (NPAs) to guide their efforts to reach the year 2000 goals for children. These national-level plans are rapidly being decentralized, and we now see many countries with plans for children at the provincial and municipal level.

#### **What success will mean**

Mid-decade goals have also been set, whose achievement by the end of 1995 will mean saving an additional 2 million young lives every year, and virtually eliminating vitamin A and iodine deficiencies that are the main causes, respectively, of blindness and retardation among children. The mid-decade targets are absolutely critical stepping-stones for reaching the year 2000 goals and we are counting on the world's NGOs to contribute mightily to their achievement.

Success in meeting the year 2000 goals will accelerate our tectonic shift:

- \* It will make an historic contribution to overcoming the worst aspects of poverty.
- \* It will enable youths to enter the workforce more healthy and educated, giving economies a significant boost.
- \* It will contribute greatly to defusing the most worrisome aspects of the population bomb, easing stress on the environment.
- \* It will make it easier for democracy to survive as the world's "bottom half" sees progress for its children.
- \* It will contribute monumentally to women's equality and racial justice.
- \* It will help stem the proliferation of civil conflicts that are fueled by deprivation and intolerance.

#### **Civil society and NGOs: people-power for progress**

The tectonic shift of the last half century did not originate as a result of government leadership, although governments and leaders have, in fact, played an important role in many cases. The shift has been led by private individuals and NGOs, by civil society.

The transformation of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; the wave of democratization that is putting an end to authoritarian regimes in much of the developing world; the new environmental consciousness and global awareness; the end of

Apartheid and the historic retreat of bias against women in many parts of the world -- all these movements, trends and events have people, not governments, as their initial prime movers. In almost every case, individuals and NGOs put pressure on governments and made it good politics for leaders to embrace specific changes, and bad politics not to. It is a fundamental feature of the final decades of the 20th century that the power of national governments is weakening and the power of civil society increasing.

Non-governmental organizations -- international, national and grassroots NGOs -- are at once protagonists and beneficiaries of this trend. You and your organizations are moving again from the sidelines to centre stage -- centre stage of a revolution that has no centre or rather has as many centres as there are democratic communities taking part in the process of change. Never have NGOs had so much scope for innovation, for influencing events, for shaping the 21st century.

Today, for example, I am joining our Chairman in launching a major campaign in which Scout movements all around the world will focus their efforts on achieving 80 per cent use of ORT by the end of 1995, an undertaking also embraced by Junior Chamber International. Now I know that something having to do with diarrhoea might not sound very historic, but the fact is that achieving this particular goal would save well over a million additional lives of young children from dehydration each year, while empowering families with a low-cost technology that they can use to help themselves. We are talking about world-class achievements here -- like Rotary International's role in bringing polio to the brink of total eradication, and the Kiwanis' commitment to help get the world's salt iodized so that the world's collective IQ can go up literally billions of points in just a couple of years!

### **The contribution of youth to lasting peace**

It is in this context that civil society -- the global village, embodied in NGOs and diverse forms of people's organizations and movements -- can also make a major contribution to lasting peace. We do not have a vaccine, a micronutrient, a miracle technology for bringing about lasting peace, but we do know that our efforts to overcome poverty's worst symptoms and causes among children by the year 2000 will make a major contribution to peace -- which was the essential reasoning behind the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to UNICEF in 1965.

As we get better and better at helping the world's poorest children "outsmart poverty" during their first three to five years of life, we must increasingly turn our attention to older children and youth. The truth is that the world -- UNICEF included -- has paid far too little attention to youth -- to their needs, to their ideas, to their rights and dreams. And yet if we look at the faces

in the multitudes marching for democracy, for the environment, for an end to Apartheid, for equality for women, for proper treatment for HIV/AIDS, etc. -- we see they are overwhelmingly young faces. If we look at the links in the Cold Chain that manages to get vaccines into the world's most remote and inaccessible villages and jungles, we see they are overwhelmingly young people. How much more could be accomplished, how much more energy could be harnessed for progressive change, how much new insight and fresh thinking could be mobilized -- if the adult world would only truly welcome the initiative and respect the contribution and encourage the participation of young people!

All too often, youth are marginalized, minimized, paternalized. They are abused and exploited by the millions when they should be nurtured, educated and included. We cut back on education budgets in the name of structural adjustment. We raise them on war toys and TV violence. We provide boys with macho role models and rob girls of their self-esteem by treating them as the "lesser sex".

And then we ask why so many drop out of school, why so many turn to violence, why so many use drugs or practice unsafe sex, and why so many descend into the moral twilight of extremist dogmas and selfishness.

#### **Issues for discussion**

In closing, permit me to outline in telegraphic style a number of issues and areas for discussion, as we search for ways to enable youth to contribute to building lasting peace:

\* First, let us mine the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** for the great treasures it holds. It is our green light, our guiding star, our legal and ethical instrument for protecting and empowering young people. Can we focus NGO power on the handful of countries -- 31 at last count -- that have still not ratified the Convention, so that by the end of 1995 it becomes the first law of all humankind? And as we approach universal ratification, we must stress the importance of implementation, with emphasis on achieving the mid-decade and year 2000 goals of the World Summit for Children so integrally related to the rights of children in health, education and nutrition.

\* Second, building on the longstanding humanitarian efforts of the ICRC, and on the experiences of Operation Lifeline Sudan, the Days of Tranquillity in El Salvador, the Peace Camps in Lebanon, the relief corridors in Ethiopia, Angola and more recently Bosnia, the rescue mission in Somalia -- building on these and other efforts, **let us find better ways to protect children caught in war.** Let us work for a total ban on the production and use of anti-personnel landmines. We need to



keep education going amidst armed conflict and bring some measure of psychological relief to war traumatized children. We must put a halt to the outrage of child soldiers.

\* Third, through peace education, education for development, multi-cultural education, through youth programmes, conflict resolution and peer counselling, **let us inculcate in the new generations life-affirming values**, tolerance toward others, respect for the environment, dedication to service, responsible reproduction and parenting, peaceful resolution of conflict, love of justice and, above all, a sense of belonging to the global village and the sacredness of all life. What is taught at home needs to be reinforced in the school, in the religious community, in the community at large. In this context, I was wondering if the NGO community would not be interested in sitting down with the National Committees for UNICEF in 35 industrialized countries in order to exchange experiences in education for development and strengthen joint efforts.

\* Fourth, we need to **start with our own organizations and our own homes**. Leaders in particular must take responsibility for being role-models, and understand that youth will turn their backs on us -- and rightly so -- if we do not practice what we preach. We must learn to speak the language of young people, stop talking down to them and start listening to them. We must recognize that they are often their own best teachers. We must allocate greater funds in support of their health, their education, their participation. But are our health services "youth-friendly"? Are our schools promoting learning that is relevant to their lives? Is the participation we encourage substantive or symbolic? Why not challenge ourselves to build a youth empowerment component into all phases of every one of our programmes, or promote creation of Youth Advisory Boards or train Youth Evaluators to help make our efforts ever more relevant to their lives and concerns?

\* Fifth, and lastly, **the empowerment of youth** needs to go beyond our homes, our schools, and our own organizations, to become a vital element of the movement towards more democratic societies. In many countries, children and youth have few avenues for expressing their opinions, needs, aspirations, ideas -- except through violence. A number of countries have begun experimenting with ways of giving children and youth a voice -- through newspapers written and produced by young people; national referenda to identify their major concerns; local and national hearings in which youth representatives meet with political leaders, and so on. We need more initiatives such as these, and on a larger scale. If we are to benefit from the energy, the idealism, the creativity of youth in building more equitable, more sustainable, and therefore more peaceful societies, then we need to work with

youth to develop truly meaningful ways in which they can be included in the decision-making processes within their communities and nations. NGOs should be at the forefront of such efforts. Perhaps we can make enough progress in this direction so that when we reach the year 2000, we can ensure that youth themselves can help us evaluate the results achieved by the World Summit for Children.

It has been a great pleasure sharing these thoughts with you today. I am truly sorry not to be able to stay for your deliberations, but I look forward to hearing the results and supporting your follow-up efforts.