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Statement by Ms. Karin Sham Poo
Acting Executive Director
of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
for the
Rwandan Humanitarian Emergency Appeal

Geneva, Switzerland
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Statement by Ms. Karin Sham Poo
Acting Executive Director
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Geneva -- 2 August 1994

I am honoured to speak here on behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as its Acting Executive Director. Mr. Grant is unable to be here, and asked me to address this critical pledging conference in his stead.

While it is an honour to address you, we have all been agonized by the trauma of Rwanda, and that is what we are discussing today. The Rwandan crisis has taken a devastating toll on the children of that country and its neighbours, and many hundreds of thousands remain at risk. Even as we mobilize to meet their immediate survival needs -- and begin to lay the groundwork for rehabilitation and longer-term assistance for the survivors -- we cannot help but fear for future generations, as a result of the genocide witnessed by the children of Rwanda and the horrific conditions they still endure in the refugee camps. UNICEF is already, among its many activities, putting into place a programme to deal with child trauma.

Rwandan children continue to die at a dramatically unacceptable rate. Approximately a quarter of a million young lives have already been lost. The French military, who are working to bury the dead, estimate that some 50,000 people have died in the Zairean refugee camps in the last two weeks, and of these, about 30,000 have been children and women. The tragedy within this tragedy is that young children, who normally make up about a fifth of a refugee flow -- comprise some one third to one half of the ocean of people caught in this desperate situation. This means that more assistance is needed faster, because children are far more susceptible to the effects of malnutrition and disease than are adults.

To make matters even worse, an extraordinary number of these children are orphans, or are separated from their families. UNICEF experts on the ground estimate that as many as 200,000 children have already become orphans or are unaccompanied by adults, often because parents leave their children with UNICEF and other relief agencies, knowing that they will receive whatever priority assistance is available. UNICEF currently cares for some 8,000 children in 11 reception centres in Goma alone.

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We know the causes of death, disease and trauma afflicting these children. We are also well aware of the means to prevent them. At this stage, Mr. Chairperson, what we lack are funds and logistical support, and they are needed very urgently. UNICEF has had to borrow US\$6 million to date to maintain existing operations: US\$3 million from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and US\$3 million from our own Emergency Programme Fund.

Among the refugees assembled just beyond Rwanda's borders, the number ~~one-killer, as we all know, is diarrhoeal dehydration, including that from cholera,~~ and now dysentery. It can sap the life of a child in a fraction of a day. To combat cholera and other diseases, oral rehydration salts, antibiotics, and, most of all, clean water are desperately needed. UNICEF is providing all of these.

Clean water, when enough is finally available, will also help avert death due to thirst - simple dehydration - and because it makes sanitation possible, it will prevent further disease. The water needs to be where people are, and cooperation is critical for either transporting it, or for relocating children to sources of available water. UNICEF is providing much of the clean water in the border camps in Zaire and in Kigali, thanks to the support of, among others, the government of Finland, which has provided milk trucks (these have unfortunately not yet arrived in Goma), and Australia, which has sent water purification equipment. Much needed water trucks from other governments are also in the pipeline.

While UNICEF is working hard to address the basic survival needs of the children caught in this drama, and is providing emergency assistance, especially in the Zairean towns of Goma and Bukavu, UNICEF is also devoting priority attention within Rwanda, assisting in the rapid and safe return of the people of Rwanda to their homes, and making preparations for their arrival there. The worst week may still, in fact, be ahead of us, as people continue to fear to return, with images of violence very new, and mistrust high. However, the new government is making efforts to ease concerns and to convince refugees to return. The government should be assisted in making it safe, and the people should be urged to return home in larger numbers.

We are convinced that a resumption of harvesting and planting -- not endless relief -- is a key to the solution of this crisis. UNICEF, therefore, is helping the government to plan for the forthcoming harvest of sorghum and bean crops, which must take place in the first two weeks of August. UNICEF has sent seven 10-ton trucks to help the government get the harvest into district warehouses. This will improve household food security and will decrease dependance on food aid.

UNICEF has maintained a presence in Kigali since the end of April, continuing to provide food, water and emergency supplies to children and their parents who were trapped in the war-torn city since the violence that claimed over 500,000 lives began. Rwandans both inside and outside of the country have received through UNICEF more than 2,000 metric tons of medical supplies, food and non-food items between April and today - a figure likely to triple before the end of the year. Vaccines, health kits and other medical supplies, high-energy biscuits, supplementary feeding for children, oral rehydration salts to treat diarrhoea, cooking sets, water and sanitation equipment, education kits and other items will be despatched to sites around the country.

The UNICEF component of the coordinated United Nations appeal addresses five basic areas, both in the refugee camps and within Rwanda: health, psycho-social, nutrition, water and sanitation, and provision of relief materials.

Rehabilitation of the water system in Kigali and other urban areas, immunization of children against measles and other killer diseases, restoration of health services and educational systems and provision of ~~psycho-social-services-to-unaccompanied-and-traumatized-children-are-among-the~~ priorities set by UNICEF for Kigali and other areas.

In the documents before this meeting you will find concise synopses of the equipment, staff and services that UNICEF is providing and hopes to provide, if funds and logistical support are made available. I will not attempt to even summarize the long lists in my brief moments speaking to you here.

As part of the inter-agency consolidated United Nations appeal of US\$434 million launched by the Secretary-General on 22 July, UNICEF asked for an immediate amount of US\$37 million to cover its specific responsibilities. Of this, we still lack approximately US\$23 million. We thank the governments of Canada, Denmark, Hong Kong, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States, as well as the European Union, for their rapid response on behalf of the children caught in this crisis, and we thank National Committees for UNICEF from a number of countries for providing most of the support we have received until now for these efforts.

Unfortunately, however, even a full donation of the remaining sum from the initial appeal would no longer fully fund the responsibilities assigned to UNICEF. As the Secretary-General said during his statement at the launch of the appeal, needs were mounting... even as he spoke. Needs have continued to increase in the 11 days since the appeal was announced, such as the unprecedented number of orphans and children separated from their families. Consequently, UNICEF has had to, once again, reassess its urgent requirements.

Much more is needed, and needed rapidly, to meet even the basic survival needs of children caught in this crisis. Despite the massive suffering, there are a great number of Rwandan children who could be saved, if funds and logistical support are made available in time. Children cannot wait for the machinery of our bureaucracies to decide if we will provide the resources and intelligent efforts to save their lives and provide some hope of normalcy for the future. What we do -- or do not do -- here today is a life or death issue for vast numbers of children, and it will affect Rwanda for generations.

Thank you.