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Statement [2] from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
International Conference on Population and Development

Cairo, Egypt
6 September 1994



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Mr. Chairman, this Conference breaks historic new ground that brings encouraging hope of far earlier progress toward better spaced and smaller, healthier families than most heretofore thought possible.

We must not allow well publicized disagreements on small portions of the Programme to obscure or undermine the unprecedented consensus that has consolidated around the bulk of this historic Programme of Action.

What is this historic new ground? Stated briefly, since the conference on population in Mexico City in 1984, with its primary focus on family planning and fertility, it has become increasingly clear that both population and development policies must be responsive to a new paradigm.

Thus, with respect to population, this Cairo Programme of Action reflects the increasing consensus that if we are to be successful two further conditions, as Dr. Nafis Sadik has said, must exist simultaneously and globally in addition to the universal availability of family planning information and services adapted to each country's needs and values.

First, the education and great empowerment of women.

Second, the confidence of parents that their children will survive.

It is now equally clear that if development is to be sustainable today, development must not only produce economic growth sustainable in the environmental sense. It also must be sustainable in a human sense -- it must break the massive grip of poverty, with its widespread illiteracy, particularly among women, and ill health, particularly among children, to help create the enabling environment for slowing population growth, while sustaining democracy, human rights, people's participation and peace.

My key messages today to you are two. First, that the actions needed to achieve this development paradigm are now within our grasp if we will only seize them. They are achievable within a decade or two. They would be politically popular and socially acceptable in both developing and developed countries. They would respond to the needs of women and children, of families and communities. And they are readily affordable.

Second, pursued with vigour, the synergism of simultaneous action could produce beneficial results for population and development well beyond the expectations of most by the years 2000, 2015 and 2050. Success would lay the foundation for more balanced development in the 21st century.

Let me amplify.

First, the great breakthrough at the core of the Programme of Action is the recognition that only a holistic approach to population and development problems can succeed. As noted in the Preamble, implementing the goals and objectives of the present 20 year Programme of Action would address many of the fundamental population, health, education and development challenges facing the entire human community. What is more, it would also result in world population growth during this period and beyond at levels close to the United Nations low variant -- that is, peaking in the year 2050 at less than 8 billion and declining thereafter.

Second, by embracing the concrete goals set forth in the Programme of Action, this conference can help accelerate momentum in an area where unprecedented progress is already underway -- improvements in the health, education and well being of children -- which will in turn have a major synergistic impact on slowing population growth.

Pursuing today's low-cost opportunities to protect the health, nutrition, and education of women and children in the developing world by the year 2000 is one of the most immediately available and affordable way of simultaneously weakening the grip of poverty, population growth, and environmental deterioration.

For these reasons, we are confident that this conference will unbracket the language contained in Chapter VIII of the Programme of Action, action point 8.16 -- which reaffirms the World Summit for Children goals for infant and child mortality reduction, and calls for further progress beyond the year 2000.

Third, this conference's recognition of the centrality of women is absolutely crucial. We must see to it that women are empowered to control their lives and their fertility, through education, jobs and access to health care, including family

planning information and services. We must place special emphasis on informing, supporting and facilitating the participation of young people -- girls and boys -- in their quest to live healthy, responsible and productive lives.

My fourth and final point refers to the vital question of resources. The modest additional funds required to implement the strategies and meet the goals established in the Programme of Action ~~are absolutely vital and must be made available quickly.~~

Without for a moment renouncing our quest for increases toward meeting the long established goal of allocating 0.7 per cent of industrial countries' GDP to official development assistance (ODA), I commend to your attention the 20/20 initiative being promoted jointly by the United Nations Development Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, and UNICEF. It is supported on two occasions in the draft Programme of Action -- both of them in brackets.

Simply put, what it involves is ensuring that developing country governments devote at least 20 per cent of their domestic budgets to providing basic social services -- primary health care including family planning, and reproductive health basic education, nutrition, and low cost water and sanitation for rural and peri-urban areas -- and that donor countries see to it that at least a similar proportion of their ODA goes to support these strategic areas for sustainable human development. On average, current funding is a much smaller share of the budgets of many developing countries and of the ODA of most industrial countries. From UNICEF's vantage-point of efforts for children in over 120 developing countries, we see considerable recent progress in increased financing for this new strategy, but so far mostly on the developing country side. The donor community must do its part in providing increased support for this new holistic strategy -- and soon -- if these inescapable problems -- that in the end effect all countries -- are to be tackled effectively and in time.

Our children and grandchildren -- and unborn generations to come -- are depending on us here in Cairo to make the wise decisions that will determine their future. As Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said at the opening: "Our destiny is not in the stars, it is within us."