


File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0055b

NOT FINAL

Remarks from Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Workshop on Youth – Adolescent Futures: Adult Fears  
NGO Forum, International Conference on Population and Development

Cairo, Egypt  
8 September 1994

	UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label
	RcE000725S
<b>Item #</b>	<b>CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01185</b>
<b>ExR/Code:</b>	<b>CF/EXD/SP/1994-0055B</b>
Workshop on Youth Adolescent Futures: Adult Fears NGO For	
Date Label Printed 24-Sep-2002	

cover + 8pp + øb

Remarks by Mr James Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Workshop on Youth --- Adolescent Futures: Adult Fears  
NGO Forum, International Conference on Population and Development

8 September 1994 - Cairo

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this important workshop. UNICEF is delighted to co-sponsor this event, at which young people and adults will explore the major issues being discussed at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). By organizing this workshop, the Commonwealth Medical Association is making a real contribution to the NGO Forum and the ICPD. My congratulations to all involved. If I may speak on behalf of the adults here today, I'd say that we are looking forward to hearing the perspectives of young people in an environment that they themselves have created.

All too often, youth have been viewed either as "problems" to be dealt with or passive "targets" of population and development programmes. Fortunately, this is changing. Young people have increasingly asserted themselves as protagonists in the great human dramas of our times. They have won themselves a central place as partners and major contributors in shaping our strategies, policies and programmes.

The stage for population and development contains some fast moving scenery -- not all of it conducive to the actions we wish to take. Overpopulation and environmental degradation are casting a shadow over prospects for human progress. There is increasing poverty and joblessness. Standards of education are not increasing quickly enough -- in many cases the problem is simply gaining access to basic education. Health care is in crisis in much of the world. We are seeing the break-up of nation states, the tearing apart of communities and the fragmentation of families. Violence is on the rise. Gross gender inequality persists. These are threats facing developing and industrialized countries alike.

Since they feel the impact of many of these problems so acutely and so directly, young people often have a clearer understanding of the new world we live in than those of us from older generations. UNICEF is working hard to update its mindset

and its practice with a view to involving youth at every stage of our efforts for children and development. We encourage others to do likewise.

Seriously addressing the issues at the heart of this conference will require action and, yes, leadership by young people. They have a unique and critical appreciation of their own situations, particularly regarding relationships and communication with their peers. They are full of the energy, creativity and motivation that will be required in all settings -- the village, the city, national and global arenas -- if the ambitious goals of this conference are to be translated into tangible and successful outcomes.

As I said in my statement before the ICPD, the great breakthrough of this conference lies in the integrated approach to poverty, population and sustainable development -- and the concrete goals to address them -- outlined in the Programme of Action. Population problems obviously cannot be solved without reducing and eventually overcoming poverty, without creating an environment in which women and couples will choose to have smaller families.

But they will not be in a position to make that crucial choice just so long as they feel that they must have many children to compensate for those who will die at a young age. They will not be in a position to make that choice just so long as so many adolescent girls become mothers and go on to have many children, spaced too closely together. They will not be in a position to make that choice until women are empowered to control their lives and their fertility, through education, jobs and access to health care, including family planning information and services. Couples will not be in a position to make that choice until men become responsible and participatory parents.

The specific dynamic of population growth in our time points to the special role and importance of young people. As you know, fertility rates have already fallen sharply in most of the world, and much of the projected future growth in our numbers will be due to population momentum. The engine of that momentum can be found in age structure, namely the large proportion of children and youth in populations, especially in the developing world. This means that more people than ever in history will be reaching reproductive age over the next few decades.

This signifies that much of the work of the ICPD is ultimately directed at influencing the behaviour, improving the lives, and widening the choices of that critical segment of the population. Although world population will continue to grow over the next decades, it obviously makes quite a difference whether it doubles or triples in size or increases only by half before it peaks, as should be the result of implementing the major health,

education, gender and family planning components of the Programme of Action -- and youth are major factor in determining the outcome.

Young women are obviously key. Teenage girls now give birth to one out of every ten babies in the world -- over 12 million births each year. For many, the costs of these early pregnancies are high. Pregnancy-related complications are the main cause of death for young women less than 18 years old. Teenagers account for up to a quarter of the 500,000 women who die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, and 99 percent of these deaths occur in the developing world. And the babies of teenage mothers face a 65 per cent greater risk of death than those of older mothers.

Survey after survey shows that many teenage girls would have preferred to delay their births. How can teenagers who wish to have their babies later in life be supported to do so? How can mothers and couples who wish to space their children further apart be empowered to do so? What roles can young people play?

\* First, we must strengthen and revitalize the many primary health care systems that have virtually collapsed or become weakened over the last decade. Children and women -- and the poor in general -- are particularly underserved and require urgent support. Primary health care, including family planning information and services, must be seen as a basic human right for all, and a key component of all population and development solutions. We must remember, also, that youth is no longer the "good health" age group. The increasing prevalence of STDs, the hurricane-like emergence of HIV/AIDS over the last decade, and the rapid rise in teenage pregnancies make health care a central issue for young people.

\* Second, we must ensure that basic education and literacy are extended to all, with emphasis on girls and young women. This is not only good and just in itself, but we know from experience that educated girls have more employment opportunities, more decision-making skills and power, and greater awareness of themselves and their society. They are also more likely to practice family planning, start their families later, space their children further apart, and have smaller families.

\* Third, we must do far more than what is being done now to end the age-old gender discrimination that permeates virtually all societies, which makes a mockery of human rights, and which ultimately fuels poverty and rapid population growth. Women's oppression doesn't start at age 18 -- we must catch it where it begins, early in the lives of girls.

The young people who helped design this workshop identified these areas, among others, as priorities for their own health and development. Our challenge is to find ways for adults and youth to work together to accelerate progress on these fronts, as well as on others young people consider important.

In our work with governments, NGOs and grassroots communities to strengthen health services, extend and improve basic education and combat gender inequality we need new partners. Young people and adults must forge a new partnership, recognizing that the abundance of energy and insights of youth are critical to tackling the burning issues of our time.

Young people clearly have a strong vested interest in this collective undertaking, both because of their immediate concerns and because it is their future that is at stake. In seeking to involve, mobilize and support them we must recognize and respond to their agendas. This means focussing on the needs of young people as they themselves have defined them, rather than just as we adults perceive them. In order to do this we must listen more frequently, more closely and more intelligently to young people.

Permit me to propose several opportunities for effective partnership between adults and youth that can make a significant impact on poverty, population and development:

\* First, the problem we face is not only to provide much-needed social services but to make them accessible and welcoming to young people. Even where services are available, they are often socially or financially inaccessible to young people, especially young women. The providers of health and social services, and education, must take into consideration the specific needs of young people. Youth are neither simply big children nor are they small adults. They need a supportive, informed and "youth friendly" environment in the schools, clinics and social service centers that should be serving them. In order to make the necessary changes, young people's ideas and participation are critical. I don't see why young people should not have a real say and a real role in both the design and delivery of all vital services.

\* Second, gender inequality will never be eradicated unless new generations emerge with new values that recognize the equality and human rights of women alongside those of men. Parents, teachers and community leaders must not only preach new values, but also practice them. With the right guidance and support from their role models, young people can relate on a more gender equal basis. They, more than adults, have the potential to break through stereotypes concerning the roles of the sexes, particularly in relation to women making their own decisions. Girls and boys need more

opportunities to interact in environments where they are treated equally and encouraged to treat each other with respect. With such a foundation, they will grow up to be a generation of men and women working together for stronger families, communities and societies. Women have clearly taken the lead in this struggle. But speaking as a man and as the father of three sons, I can say that we males have our work cut out for us; we have a great deal of learning to do, and a great deal of changing to do, if gender equality is ever to be achieved. The young people who gathered in Cairo last week to discuss the ICPD are, I must say, excellent models of a new, more enlightened generation of young men and women.

\* Third, no group has more of an interest and more of an urgent need to put an end to violence in all its forms than young people. Who are the soldiers sent to fight wars? -- overwhelmingly young people. Who are routinely abused in the privacy of the home? -- young people, especially girls. Who are the main victims of brutality and exploitation in the streets of nearly every city? -- young people. Who are singled out by the media for a steady diet of violent images? -- young people. The seeds of most forms of violence we see around us are planted in the homes, schoolyards and streets where children learn and play. We must recognize that our societies are violence-ridden and that young people are the principal victims. It is therefore in partnership with youth that we must promote value systems that encourage people to resolve their conflicts peacefully, that instill tolerance of diversity, and respect for each and every human being. There is no venue where these values and the skills to live them cannot be taught. But the key, really, is providing young people, especially poor young people, with opportunities -- schooling, jobs, outlets for creativity and self-expression -- so that they can overcome the negative influences around them and begin to build more peaceful societies.

\* Fourth, there is no greater enemy of youth than poverty, and there is no greater obstacle to social progress than generations denied the benefits of economic development and employment. We at UNICEF believe that eradicating poverty's worst manifestations and causes constitutes the great unfinished business of the 20th century. What is encouraging, however, is that more and more governments are understanding that investing in the health, education and skills of children and young people is not only good politics but good social and economic investment too. As we see on the agenda of today's workshop, our younger colleagues have identified socio-economic problems facing youth to be of major concern to them. The challenge before us now, it to work together to transform socio-economic

problems into opportunities for young people.

\* Fifth, with the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, we have been given a powerful tool to extend and protect the rights of children and youth -- all their rights, civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural. Don't be fooled by the Convention's name -- it applies to youth as well as children, up to age 18. Now young people know better than anyone else that the existence of rules and laws does not necessarily mean they are followed. But having the Convention as international law means that the 166 countries which have ratified it to date must show progress toward abiding by the high ethical and legal standards it embodies. It gives all of us a guide and a context for demanding that the full range of rights be respected, regardless of age, gender or economic status. Not only can children and young people now invoke the protections contained in the Convention, they can also participate more fully in society and in the decisions affecting their lives -- for these, too, are rights guaranteed by this document. Indeed, the four previous points I enumerated all come under different articles of the Convention. I call on young people and adults to come together to demand that all countries ratify the Convention by the end of 1995. If your country has already ratified it, you must hold your government, your society and your communities accountable for their solemn legal commitment to children's and young people's rights. Most importantly, each and every one of you can become a legal educator and organizer of your peers, with an eye toward creating grassroots movements for human rights and social progress.

Having identified possible areas for common action, we must ask ourselves why it is that we have not yet made the progress required to involve young people as key partners? The title of this workshop "Adolescent Futures -- Adult Fears", may provide a clue. I suspect that we adults have been afraid to truly listen to our children and reluctant to cede some of our power and control to those who are younger than we are. However, if we hope to solve the problems confronting us, we really have no choice -- the time has come for us adults to put aside our fears and roll up our sleeves and for you young people to take action on the issues that impact on your -- and all of our -- lives.

What can adults do? First, we need to be convinced that youth are a priority group to work with. We as leaders and activists in the field of population and development need to become strong advocates for young people to ensure that their voices are heard. Second, we need to build alliances. As we will see today, young people's problems do not fall into neat categories, but rather span diverse sectors including health,

human rights, education and economics. It makes little sense, for example, for organizations dealing with family planning to work in isolation from those focussed on other problems facing young people such as substance abuse, violence prevention or unemployment. And third, we ourselves must be willing to take risks as professionals. We must loosen our grip on what we perceive to be the right answers, and allow young people to offer us new and perhaps more effective directions.

What can young people do? Of course, adults are only half of the picture. Young people will need to contribute their own perspective if we are to be successful. First, you need to organize amongst yourselves and identify your common problems, goals and potential solutions. It is only by developing a common agenda and working in unison that you will succeed in your communities. Second, you must help your peers recognize their abilities and become collective advocates for youth. You understand your problems better than anyone else, and your own solutions are those most likely to succeed. And third, for adults to support your agenda and help create space for you, you must be willing to learn from our experience, as we must accept increasing leadership from you. A strengthened partnership between the generations is critical to making progress for ourselves and our children in the future.

Now, how can we do it? A vital ingredient for making our plans realities is, of course, adequate resources for basic social services for all people. I believe you discussed this issue during the youth consultation, and if I may quote your Declaration, "In many cases, the resources available to children are already diminished by economic injustices within and between countries." I agree with you.

The modest additional funds required to implement the population and development strategies we have been discussing here in Cairo, are absolutely vital. Action must be taken now to make these funds available quickly.

In this regard, I commend to your attention the 20/20 initiative which is supported on two occasions in the Draft Programme of Action. Unfortunately, both of these references are still 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-rural areas -- and that donor countries see to it that at least a similar proportion of their ODA goes to support 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 industrialised countries. From UNICEF's vantage-point of efforts for children, youth and women, we see considerable recent progress in increased financing for this new holistic strategy, but so far mostly on the developing country side. The donor community must do its part in providing increased support for this new strategy -- and soon -- if these inescapable problems that in the end affect all countries, are to be tackled effectively and in time.

This can only happen if younger people and older people unite their efforts. Availability of these resources will touch the lives of each of us. They will ensure the strengthened primary health care, the availability of basic education and literacy for all and the reduction of the worst aspects of poverty.

This is a challenge for all countries - the richest, the poorest, the biggest and the smallest. I believe the 1990s have opened a "window of opportunity" to meet this challenge together. But if we do not act, or if we continue business as usual and fail to join forces for human progress, the window could slam shut.

It is a challenge for all of us -- each of us as individuals. Martin Luther King once said that everyone can be great because everyone can serve. Well, I think all of you are great, because you are here in search of a better future for all. I wish you well in your deliberations and will closely follow the guidance that you give us on how to more effectively respond to the needs of young people and to support them in responding to their own needs -- and to do so without fear!