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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the closing of the
Third Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York
5 October 1994

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ENGLISH ONLY

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1994 Third Regular Session

FOR INFORMATION

Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the closing of the
Third Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York - 5 October 1994

The Third Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board -- our last meeting in 1994 -- is about to draw to a close. It has been, as I hoped in my opening statement, "intense, businesslike and productive." "Intense", because our dialogue over the past three days has been extremely frank, even passionate... Our new format and schedule permit more give and take, broader participation, and more in-depth discussion than the previous arrangements. "Businesslike", because of the seriousness, the sense of ownership, and the professionalism that characterized our deliberations. And "productive" because we have gone through a very full agenda and come out with concrete decisions and solid guidance on a number of issues vital to UNICEF and its mission.

As down the hall from this chamber this week presidents and prime ministers addressed the burning issues of our time, this Executive Board has also made history for UNICEF by showing that effective dialogue is possible in our new Board framework. I want to thank the distinguished delegates of member and observer countries alike -- as well as our National Committee representatives -- for the energy, creativity and thoroughness you have brought to this meeting.

I would describe one of the major threads going through our discussions this week as -- in the words of the Booz, Allen and Hamilton consultants: "magnificent results, but..." That is, UNICEF gets good results -- measurable results that save and improve many millions of young lives every year -- that seems not to be in dispute. But *how efficiently* does it achieve those results... that appears to be the main concern. I certainly hope that this meeting has made it clear that your Secretariat shares this concern and is serious about getting rid of that "but" in your assessment.

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In an effective, information-packed, one hour presentation, the consultants from Booz, Allen and Hamilton gave us an objective, frank and specific outline of the direction the Management Review is taking. They indicated that UNICEF's reputation for getting good end results is alive and well. That said, the consultants moved quickly to focus on things that UNICEF can and should do better, things that can make us into a more efficient and effective organization.

Importantly, they demonstrated that we have a big job to do in the area of human resource motivation and development. We take this need very seriously. We count on our people, and we must not take them for granted.

Booz, Allen is also clearly developing practical recommendations on:

- * transparency in data and performance;
- * improved financial processes;
- * more focus and results from our information systems;
- * useful ideas for improving our supply function;
- * harmonization of global goals and country programming;
- * effectiveness in programme planning;
- * fundraising improvements;
- * new perspectives on emergency programmes, and
- * early hypotheses for improvements in organization.

The consultants demonstrated that there is a strong will for change within UNICEF. It was a telling message when they showed charts from the staff survey showing that UNICEF members at all levels are proud of UNICEF's work -- on the order of 80 per cent -- and that 80 per cent also say they want UNICEF to change for the better. This confirms that the Management Review can be an immense help to our effectiveness, and we look forward to the completion of Booz, Allen's work by the end of the year.

I was also pleased to note the various positive comments from delegations on the follow-up to the Multi-Donor Evaluation that the Secretariat has reported on. I am gratified to see that the Open-Ended Working Group to follow-up on the Multi-Donor Evaluation has become a platform for a particularly open and fruitful exchange of views and collaboration between interested Board members and the Secretariat. I would be pleased to see this approach continued in the future.

I was glad that there was such an active discussion during yesterday's session of the draft Health Strategy paper. The insightful comments and constructive criticisms offered by many

delegations were very helpful to the Secretariat as we continue the process of consultation and re-drafting. As suggested by the delegate from Austria, the paper to be presented to the Board early in 1995 will be "as short as possible and as long as necessary."

And I believe we have good reason to be satisfied that a most useful agenda -- plan of work -- has been set for 1995.

Madam President, this Board session is the final session for 1994, which, as you all know, is the final year of my third term as the Executive Director of UNICEF. The question of my successor and whether -- as some have proposed -- my term will be extended by one year to coincide with the target date for achieving the mid-decade goals, has yet to be decided by the Secretary-General.

Nevertheless, on the possibility that this may be my last meeting with the Executive Board, let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the privilege of serving as Executive Director over the past 15 years.

As I have said before, over my lifetime I have been guided by certain principles which I believe are very much those that have been underlying UNICEF's work. Foremost among these has been the principle so aptly captured by Arnold Toynbee:

"Our age is the first 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."

That is what UNICEF has been doing since its new incarnation in 1950. And our year 2000 goals, if we achieve them, will really represent having crossed the watershed toward meeting the most essential needs of the great majority of the world's children, thus giving all children a far more equal start in life.

The second principle is that there is an urgency to our work. Morality does march with changing capacity. As Primo Levi has said: "If we can relieve torment and do not, we become the tormentors."

Since 1950 we have seen global per capita GNP more than double... the invention of such low-cost interventions as the vaccines for polio and measles, and oral rehydration therapy against the second largest killer of children, diarrhoeal dehydration... a vast increase in the world's social mobilization and information capacity -- radio, TV, literacy and schools.

UNICEF has represented a major force for bringing this change in capacity to relieve torment to the attention of the world.

To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw: some people see things and ask 'why'. But UNICEF has dreamed of things that never were, and said "why not"?

It has been my privilege to be Executive Director of UNICEF during an era when it has dreamed and asked "why not" a child survival revolution -- and five million fewer children die annually as a result.

UNICEF dreamed of the world's first truly global summit, and the first to be convened for children, and asked "why not"? The result has been an unprecedented World Summit for Children, with its Declaration and Plan of Action for the decade of the 1990s.

UNICEF dreamed of a Convention on the Rights of the Child which would be the most comprehensive and complex of any human rights convention in history, and asked "why not"?, and later dreamed of it being the first ever universally ratified convention, and asked "why not"? The result: the most ratified human rights convention ever -- ratified by 166 countries -- and a 1995 target for universal ratification.

We have had the satisfaction of seeing the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo embrace a new holistic approach to population which is largely identical with that framed by the World Summit for Children, with goals for achievement by the year 2000. We have also the satisfaction of looking forward to the World Summit on Social Development which should give additional impetus to our work for children.

Distinguished delegates, the world has never before set a framework of detailed goals to be achieved in a decade. To date, the progress has been satisfying -- a majority of countries will achieve a majority of the 13 goals set for mid-decade. The real test of course, will be the year 2000.

Madam President, there are only 324 weeks until the end of December of the year 2000. I can think of no better way of marking the new millennium than to be meeting the most essential needs of all our children.

Again, thank you all for giving me the opportunity to serve in this cause.

I would be remiss in closing without first paying tribute to the President of the Executive Board, Anna Semamba Makinda, who ends her successful term of office on 31 December. Without neglecting her duties as Tanzania's Minister of Community Development, Women's Affairs and Children, Ms. Makinda has travelled far and wide for UNICEF and provided excellent guidance to the work of the Secretariat. Without a "hiccup", she has presided over our efforts during the uncertainties and complexities of UN reform, and change in our own Executive Board composition and arrangements. I personally am in her debt. And in recognition of the grace, humour and professionalism with which she had conducted our meetings, I present her with this gavel.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said that "The success or failure of any government must be measured by the well-being of its citizens." We at UNICEF -- Board and Secretariat -- are measured by the well-being of the world's youngest citizens, its children. This is, of course, an almost impossible standard to have to measure up to, but one that we welcome if only because it forces us to do more, and do it better, every day. And we do take encouragement from the fact that, despite all the setbacks for children we are so aware of, the over-all condition of children is improving significantly from decade to decade, and in the 1990s, from year to year.
