


File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0067a

NOT FINAL

Remarks by Dr. Guido Bertolaso
Deputy Executive Director (External Relations)
of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Presentation of the Manila Agenda for Social Development
in the ESCAP Region
and the
Progress of the Philippines on the Mid-Decade Goals for Children

Manila, the Philippines
18 October 1994

	UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label
	Rcf000757N
Item #	CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01325
ExR/Code:	CF/EXD/SP/1994-0067a
Presentation of the Manila Agenda for Social Development :	
<i>Date Label Printed</i>	29-Oct-2002

cover + 3pp + Øb



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

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First, allow me to convey the apologies of Jim Grant, UNICEF's Executive Director, who is unable to be here today because of other pressing obligations associated with the UN General Assembly. He asked me to send his warm greetings to our Philippine hosts and, in particular, to His Excellency President Fidel Ramos. Mr. Grant asked me to speak here on his behalf yesterday and today, precisely because of the importance UNICEF attaches to the World Summit for Social Development and this region's potential contribution to it, as well as to the process underway in the Philippines toward reaching the goals set for children.

This public, presidential review of efforts to achieve the mid-decade goals for the children of the Philippines is the first of its kind in Asia. It sets an excellent precedent that we hope and trust will be followed elsewhere. The personal involvement of presidents and prime ministers bolsters accountability up and down the line of responsibility, helps make the effort a national one, and ultimately makes success far more likely.

The commitment shown and the actual performance of the Philippines with respect to children has been outstanding. Allow me to cite just one example of the remarkable progress that has been made. In 1985, only 21 per cent of the country's children were fully immunized; but by 1989, 80 per cent of the children were covered -- a year ahead of the global UCI target -- and today 92 per cent of all infants are receiving life-saving vaccines, a level of coverage that surpasses the global goal of 90 per cent that the World Summit for Children said should be achieved by the year 2000.

So when it comes to immunization, the Philippines has already entered the 21st century! By way of comparison, Manila's immunization coverage at age one is better than that of

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Washington D.C., New York, London or Paris.

This emphasis on protecting children against disease is mirrored by the country's efforts to protect children's rights. The Philippines was one of the early ratifiers of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its first compliance report -- signed personally by President Ramos -- will be reviewed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in February. The Child Protection Act was signed into law in 1992. The Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development is working with Congress to implement the legislative agenda for children. Local government officials in particular have begun to seek ways to combat exploitative child labour, an ongoing, worrisome problem.

The National Programme of Action for children, adopted in 1992, has been integrated into the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (1993-1998), as well as into the government's Poverty Alleviation Programme. A monitoring system has been developed as part of the Medium Term Development Plan. Programmes of action for children are being developed at sectoral, provincial and municipal levels.

The Philippines is rapidly advancing toward achievement of the mid-decade goals it set for itself. It is truly inspiring to see how high a priority the effort is being given by the central authorities -- up to the highest political level -- and by governors and mayors. In his State of the Nation address in July, President Ramos reiterated his administration's commitment to children, including the mid-decade goals, and he announced increased government investments in primary health care, basic education, safe drinking water, environmental sanitation, family planning and nutrition.

Most of the mid-decade goals are on track -- the targets for immunization, polio, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child have already been achieved, and progress is on schedule for neonatal tetanus, vitamin A, salt iodization, oral rehydration therapy, Baby Friendly Hospitals, malnutrition, and safe water supply. Extra efforts will be needed, however, to reach the goals for measles, basic education and sanitation, and here UNICEF stands ready to provide whatever additional assistance may be necessary.

All in all, the Philippines' performance is an excellent one, an example to other countries in the region and the world. Permit me to single out two features that appear to be producing very positive results:

* first, the decentralized system of accountability that has been developed around efforts for children. Every Governor and every Mayor is now working for children's well-being

within the framework of the State/City Programme of Action to achieve both the 1995 and year 2000 goals. Strong sectoral and national-level leadership provides policy guidance, increasing resources and programme and monitoring expertise to regional, provincial and local activities.

* Second, in monitoring, the Philippines has introduced an innovation: maps showing the disparities that lurk behind national averages, highlighting areas and regions in need of special attention. These maps are extremely useful tools for policy- and decision-makers, who are able to redirect efforts and resources to problem areas. We commend this approach to all countries.

To sum up, the Philippines is seriously carrying out the solemn promises made to children in 1990. All the elements are in place -- presidential and sectoral leadership; increased resource allocations for basic social services; integration of programme of action for children into national development plan; decentralization with accountability; strong social mobilization and NGO participation; and improved monitoring of progress. I am certain that the distinguished Ministers from throughout the region who are here today will be able to take home important lessons with them.

I understand that President Ramos and many other personalities will be going from this meeting straight to commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the historic Leyte Gulf Landing of 1944. As we share your celebration, let us remember that liberating the potential of each and every child is every much as sacred a national cause as was that heroic liberation half a century ago. Just as allies united for freedom on the beach of Leyte then, today a global alliance for human progress, starting with children, must be forged.

Thank you, my Filipino friends, for what you are doing for your children, and for the impetus you are giving to the global cause of human liberation.