

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0068

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Suggested Speaking Points by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to the  
International Fourth World Family Congress  
on the occasion of  
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Reception at UNICEF House – New York  
17 October 1994



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Rcf0006111

Item # **CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1998-02510**

ExR/Code: **CF/EXD/SP/1994-0068**

International Day for Eradication of Poverty. DRAFT Speak:  
Date Label Printed 29-Oct-2002

cover + 5 pp + Ø'b

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International Fourth World Family Congress

Reception at UNICEF House, 17 October 1994  
(International Day for the Eradication of Poverty)

Suggested introductory speaking points for Mr. Grant

"Rarely are the poor at the table themselves when poverty is being discussed. Today, at this International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, in this International Year of the Family, UNICEF is honored to have you here, you the parents and heads of families who live in the most difficult circumstances and you the community workers, and you the ATD Fourth World Volunteers. We are grateful that you came to us, as UNICEF wants and needs to hear from you, to learn from you, to enter into a dialogue so that we see, as your President said last year at the Commemoration at the United Nations in Honor of the Victims of Extreme Poverty "and therefore reach out".

I would like to welcome Mrs. Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk, President of the International ATD Fourth World Movement; Excellencies from several UN missions who have special relationship with the Fourth World Movement; ~~Mrs. Matilda Gueme, longstanding friend of the International ATD Fourth World Movement and friend of UNICEF~~; NGOs who work with the Movement; and UNICEF staff.

Before we hear Mrs. de Vos van Steenwijk, let me just wish you, wish us all, that this gathering here at UNICEF House will add to the sharing, listening, learning of your most meaningful ten-day Family Congress here in the United States.

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## Possible issues for Mr. Grant's response

1. Madam, I thank you for the kind words you had for UNICEF. And let me say that I am very moved by what I have seen this afternoon, namely as you say, the prove that the very poor can be reached and that they readily allow us to reach them.

### 2. Eradicating poverty

Eradicating poverty, or at least its worst manifestations, is the great unfinished business of the 20th century. For the first time in history, humankind has the capacity to satisfy the basic needs of all. Morality must march with this new capacity. It is becoming a moral imperative to use our greatly enhanced capacities to bring the basic benefits of modern civilization to all.

### 3. Extreme poverty as a human rights issue

The founder of your Organization, Father Joseph Wrésinski said that "wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated"... It is very timely, and also in a way influenced by him that, as you know, poverty as a human rights issue was discussed last week in the seminar called "Extreme poverty: Denial of Human Rights" across the street at the United Nations. Some of you were there to bear witness. The conclusions of the seminar will be a major element in the report entitled " Human Rights and Extreme Poverty" which is currently underway under the auspices of the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations. The Convention on the Rights of the Child which has become national law in most of your countries, offers a new instrument for advocacy in favour of unreached and marginalized children.

4. As a schoolboy in Beijing where I grew up I had to weave my bicycle to avoid the bodies of people frozen to death or starved to death during the night. That was in a very different world, that considered poverty inevitable. But today, on my way to work every morning I still pass the bodies of the homeless, the poorest of the poor, in this richest society in the world, on the threshold of the 21st century. This is an obscenity, the consequence of a moral bankruptcy that is a shame on all of us. We must work together to put an end to this scourge.

5. The lesson of the past five-six years is that ordinary people can organize and become the motor of change. This is why you are here today. This is the decade of people power, of civil society as the motor of change. The poor must make their voices heard in social movements worldwide and the international community, the United Nations, must listen, respond to their priorities and help them help themselves.

6. What UNICEF can do

Our programmes must empower poor communities, families, individuals. We must redirect priorities to identifying and reaching the underserved populations. Here we can and will learn from you. Where do you want UNICEF to be more active and effective. Where should our priorities be? You, the parents and you, the community workers and the Fourth World Movement Volunteers who live work in 25 countries with the unreached: Please return to your countries, to your communities and decide how we can be of greater service to your own agenda for change. This way, chances will be greater for truly sustainable development.

7. What better place to start than with children? We know now how to put a shield of protection around the first fragile months and years of children. By the year 2000 we can vanquish poverty's worst symptoms and some its worst causes in the lives of children. The World Summit for Social Development next March represents us with a historic opportunity to focus on the eradication of poverty. Return to your homes with energy and hope, and try to get your governments to speak out loud and clear in Copenhagen, to set measurable goals for change.

8. The other side

This is the material side of what we can do. Hand in hand with this goes the other, the inner side which Elie Wiesel so impressively evoked last year: Extreme poverty as humiliating the humanity of its victims.... and we, in fact, allowing poverty, hunger, homelessness and misery to increase their realm, as actors. UNICEF has always emphasized the human side of its work. But, I say this in all honesty, we could do better. Sometimes, the human side of poverty disappears in numbers, goals, strategies, programmes, all necessary approaches, but often all too isolated, technical and therefore seemingly cold. In other words, we need to be reminded of how to be compassionate. This is another reason why I am so happy that we share this afternoon hour: You

can teach us to be compassionate again.

I thank you all for coming here and wish you a good continuation of the Family Congress in Washington.

(To follow: informal exchanges)

## ATD

- Movement was started in **1956** in France, by Father Joseph Wresinski, with the families of the Noisy-Le-Grand shanty town in Paris. At present ATD volunteers work in 35 countries in both developed and developing countries.
- ATD has collaborated with UNICEF since **1979** in various capacities, and has been in consultative status with UNICEF's Executive Board for several years.
- In **1986**, for UNICEF's 40th. anniversary, the children's branch of ATD, TAPORI, presented a "penny portrait" to UNICEF's Executive Director, through the contribution of thousands of pennies.
- In **1989** and **1991**, UNICEF's Executive Board adopted resolutions on "Reaching the Poorest".
- Since **1992**, ATD and the Evaluation and Research office have collaborated on the preparation of a case study on "Lessons Learned" from reaching the poorest in a sustainable way.

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- The meeting on Human Rights of the poor was the first seminar of its kind and the disenfranchised poor who were present provided eloquent testimony regarding their poverty and the indignity and discrimination that they and their children suffered simply because of their poverty;
- Also present at the seminar were "experts" on the macroeconomic and social issues regarding poverty, (the importance of coopting the 'Non-Poor'); as well as the implications of the International Human Rights law that specifically provides for: a) the Right to Life, b) procedures against Discrimination and Inequality and c) for Economic, Social and Cultural rights
- A set of draft resolutions were formulated by the Centre for Human Rights and ATD organisers, and discussed on the last day. A provision was made for the inclusion of CRC and CEDAW in the language, as well as recognition of the rights of the whole family as a whole.