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Address by Dr. Guido Bertolaso
Deputy Executive Director (External Relations)
of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
2nd International Animation for Development Workshop

Orlando, Florida
17 November 1994

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Address by Dr. Guido Bertolaso
Deputy Executive Director (External Relations)
of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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2nd International Animation for Development Workshop

Orlando - 17 November 1994

As you could see in the video, there has been major progress for the world's children in recent years. What you may not know is how animation has contributed to this progress. Today I will share with you some thoughts on how animation can do even more to make the world a better place for children.

But first let me say that our Executive Director, Jim Grant, is terribly disappointed not to be here with you today -- he is in the hospital, recovering from surgery. He asked me to speak to you on his behalf, knowing that I would be well-suited to address this audience -- and not just because I am Deputy Executive Director for External Relations. Mr. Grant knew that, as a member of the "baby-boom" generation that grew up after World War II, I was practically raised on animated cartoons. What he didn't know, and I reveal it here publicly for the first time, is that as a child in Italy in the 1950s I was a member of the Club di Topolino -- in English, the Mouseketeers Club.

In fact, my childhood was populated with all the wonderful cartoon characters that have won people's hearts and become part of universal culture over the past decades. What is more, these characters continued to play a special role in my life; they have provided me with a delightful link with my own children, and have even served as a most helpful tool in my work. For example, one Christmas Day a few years ago, when I was Director-General for Social Affairs in the Prime Minister's Office, we arranged for all of Italy's TV channels to carry the half-hour anti-drugs programme "All-Stars to the Rescue", that was a joint effort of leading animation studios such as Disney, Hanna-Barbera and Warner Brothers, all represented here today. In the U.S., the programme aired simultaneously on over a thousand TV stations on April 21, 1990.

Having experienced the power of this medium in the past, I am now most eager to see how UNICEF and the animation industry can work together to unleash its potential even further.

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Let me say a few words about UNICEF. The United Nations Children's Fund is, as its name implies, the UN agency that deals with children. We will celebrate our 50th anniversary in 1996 -- which means that we are a year younger than the UN itself. Although the governments of the world are our boss, our job is to tell them -- and tell the public at large -- that they can, indeed must, do far better for the world's children, who are our collective future. And we help them do it.

All of you work at the cutting edge of technology. What we are trying to do in the 140 developing countries where we have programmes of cooperation, is to harness the extraordinary technological and scientific capacity of this age to benefit not just a privileged minority of children but all children -- primarily the children of the more than one billion poor living on about a dollar a day.

And we think that by saving children's lives -- some 25 million since the mid-1980s -- and by giving them a decent start in life, we can give each child a fighting chance against poverty. One by one, these children can then contribute to building more prosperous economies and more democratic societies. This, in turn, helps slow population growth and ease stress on the environment, helps improve women's status and prevent wars.

UNICEF's constituency -- the world's children -- is the animation industry's primary audience, and all of us have a stake in their survival, protection and development.

UNICEF first used animation in the early 1960s for advocacy purposes, but it wasn't until the mid-1980s, when we used it at community viewing centres in Nepal, that we discovered how well animation got vital information across to literate and non-literate audiences. Ever since, we have been committed to investing in the creativity of the medium. That is why we are all here today.

In Nepal, animated features and shorts were often projected at night with the use of a generator, onto a white cloth suspended from a tree. A Nepalese presenter would mimic the voices of the characters over a megaphone.

We have come a long way since then, thanks to our partnership with leading pioneers and key players in the field of animation. Today UNICEF is involved in the production of major projects like:

* the Spanish-language adaptation of Sesame Street -- Plaza Sesamo -- a 130-episode series being televised across Latin America;

* the Meena animated character promoting equality for girls in Asia;

* Maximo, the talking toucan, is helping us to improve children's health in the Andean region;

* and, in association with ASIFA, the international animation society, UNICEF has just developed a new award at the Ottawa 94 International Animation Festival, to be awarded to the animated film that best represents a vision for children in a healthy and environmentally safe world.

Thanks to partners like Disney, Hanna-Barbera, ASIFA, Children's Television Workshop and Televisa, we are beginning to get our messages across in innovative, more effective ways to ever-larger audiences.

As you saw earlier, there have been a number of major developments for children in recent years. The World Summit for Children and the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child have proved that with the commitment of governments and peoples, tremendous strides for children can be made.

You may ask how animation fits into the process of achieving the goals set by the World Summit for Children and the yet more ambitious targets for humankind that will be set at the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, to be held next March in Copenhagen.

I truly believe that animation can do much more than just "fit into" this process. *It can help make it happen.*

The important thing to keep in mind is that most of the goals for children will only be reached if there is strong public mobilization and social commitment. What we have done since those early days in Nepal has proved that this mobilization and commitment can be achieved, and that **an integrated communications strategy, including animation, is a key part of the process.**

There are many reasons why this is so, but the main one is that animation is a universal medium. It can help communicators by providing clear, concise images which are easily understood. But it does yet more -- it cuts across cultural and social barriers and reaches directly to the people. Animation can communicate sensitive messages in a way that does not alienate audiences. It can create communications symbols which can be widely identified through a whole region or throughout the world. Animation has entertainment value and allows people to laugh while learning. And I must admit that some of our messages --

for example those on preventing deaths caused by diarrhoeal dehydration -- are much easier to take with a little humour!

We believe that animation can be an important catalyst, a global communication medium that can help make the world a better place for our children. That is the reason why we have brought you here to Orlando for this two-day summit.

Allow me to quickly list a few areas and themes where we believe the animation industry can make a real difference -- not an exhaustive list by any means, but an attempt to get our creative juices flowing:

*** First**, we must remember that the communications revolution has given us the capacity to **include** the world's developing nations and poor populations even as social and economic exclusion continues to be the chief characteristic of most national and global economic systems. This imposes on communicators an ethical responsibility and opens a business opportunity: the ethical responsibility is to use the tools of the communications revolution -- including animation -- to help relieve suffering and alleviate poverty, and the business opportunity is to invest in the future prosperity of poor countries and communities that are providing new audiences and new markets for your products.

The message is this: **avoid the temptation to write off the developing countries -- Africa for example -- as "basket-cases"**. We must not forget that the so-called Asian Tigers were dismissed by many economists as hopeless as recently as 20 years ago, and today they are producing and consuming much of the world's industrial output. There is much to be gained -- financially, socially and ethically -- from focusing more of our energies and creativity on the developing countries as well as on poor communities in the richer nations.

*** Second**, each new generation needs **new heroes and new role-models**. Through TV, movies, video games and the new interactive media, animation increasingly defines the heroes and villains that are our children's paradigms of good and evil, right and wrong. Much of the fabric of contemporary families and communities is frayed and tattered, and more and more of young peoples' values and attitudes come from or are heavily influenced by the mass media. If the "good guys" on TV and in the movies are violent and filled with hatred and intolerance for "bad guys" whose "badness" consists of little more than being different from them -- well, we have a formula for perpetuating the ethnic and racial and religious strife that we see in many parts of the world, as well as in many of our own communities. If girls

and boys are portrayed in a traditional, stereotyped way, there is little hope of attaining the gender equality, women's empowerment and resilient families demanded by our times.

We know from many of the masterpieces your studios have produced that solid values and appropriate role models can make for good, money-making entertainment. Your industry has done a vast amount of research on how TV, movies and video games influence young viewers at different stages of their development; at the same time, UNICEF has at its disposal a vast amount of information on how to protect young people's health and promote their all-around development. **Can we not marry these two categories of recent knowledge?** We would like to work with you and to support your efforts to provide our children with appropriate role-models and good values.

* **Third**, there is so much more that can be done to solve concrete problems, very urgent problems we are facing. I remember, for example, that a mass media campaign that relied heavily on animated public service spots in the U.K. helped bring domestic accidents involving children down by about 50 per cent a few years ago. Then there's the example of "Break the Silence -- Kids Against Child Abuse", a documentary that used animation to explain this sensitive issue and offer solutions. John Canemaker, the man who produced the animations, will be telling us about this in more detail this afternoon. Another example: In Mexico, diarrhoea deaths have been cut in half in only three years, in part due to a remarkably effective campaign using animated spots on television. In fact, animation is helping countries all over the world to achieve the goals set at the World Summit for Children -- but **far more can be done** to maintain the momentum, and accelerate it where progress is lagging. We need your help, your advice, your vision.

* **Fourth**, we believe that the animation industry as a whole stands to gain from **building the animation capacity of Third World countries**. We all know that the vast markets of the developing world will never be fully served by means of imports alone; the production of culturally-sensitive, locally-relevant animated features and shorts -- supported by the major animation studios in the industrialized countries -- could tap this extraordinary potential. We believe that there is a tremendous repository of talent, new ideas and creative approaches in the developing world that could enrich animation worldwide.

* **Fifth**, when I was in Rwanda recently, trying to assist more than 100,000 unaccompanied children -- orphaned, lost

or abandoned -- I wondered when these children would laugh again. I wondered when they would find relief from images of terror and death? We are coming to better understand the complex psycho-social mechanisms of war trauma among children and are searching for appropriate interventions that can be applied to groups as well as individuals. I believe that cartoons should be part of our response; not all cartoons, of course, are appropriate -- but surely we can stock our relief supplies with scores of **cartoons and animated shorts that can help children heal and laugh again.** I hope that we can focus on this critical area in our discussions during this summit.

* **Sixth**, and finally, we hope that **commercial partnerships** can be formed in which we bring entertainment and education together -- and that, in the future, we will be able to generate funds through merchandising as a result of these successful partnerships. The Meena project with Hanna-Barbera in Asia; Plaza Sesamo with CTW and Televisa in Mexico; and the Maximo project with Disney in Ecuador -- all have significant potential in this respect, and we hope to develop many more such projects.

These are some of the ways we are seeking your assistance in using animation to achieve dramatic, measurable progress for children in the rest of this decade and into the next century. We at UNICEF want to challenge you to work with us, to develop new ways to reach into as many corners of the world as we can with as many messages as we can.

I would like to start this process right here at this conference. We have allowed an hour and a half today for luncheon in order to facilitate networking and communication between all of you who are attending this summit. If you are willing, I would like to ask you to use that time to get together and come up with some ways to work with one another.

We are already working with the broadcasting industry worldwide. Three years ago now, our Executive Director addressed the International Council of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and challenged them to set aside one day a year to focus on children's issues. They designated the second Sunday each December as the **International Children's Day of Broadcasting** -- a day to "tune in to kids".

The response has been unprecedented. With the Council's help, we expect to have **1,500 stations with audiences of millions in more than 120 countries taking part this year.** Presidents and Prime Ministers have gone on television and radio on the Day; special shows have been produced for the Day, appealing to children or highlighting children's issues; and children

themselves have become involved. In many countries, the Day has prompted serious soul-searching and even new policy initiatives.

In November 1992, broadcasters from 11 Latin American and Caribbean countries met and formed what they called a **"solidarity network"**. The broadcasters signed a declaration and letter of commitment acknowledging their responsibility to use the power of their media to help solve the most acute problems affecting children in the region.

The broadcasters identified messages about positive family environments for child-rearing, education as a means to social mobility and social equality, and health information aimed at reducing infant mortality through breastfeeding, vaccinations and proper nutrition as ways in which they could help children. Since then, the solidarity group has produced public service announcements that have been used throughout the region.

Here today, we have the best and the brightest in the animation industry. We also have senior resource people from UNICEF and elsewhere who can advise on development issues and what most needs to be done for children.

I'm asking you to come together to form a worldwide group of animation industry members for children to help us as the International Council of NATAS has done. With the Council's help, we were able to form partnerships for coproductions with influential broadcasters. We were able to reach key people in the broadcast industry.

We would like to do the same with the animation industry. What I would envision is an informal association of animators and studios -- a solidarity group, if you like -- that can work with us, advise on techniques and help us form partnerships that will best use our resources to help children. I hope that, in the next two days -- if of course you agree to the idea -- you can come up with a name for the group and perhaps even a letter of commitment along the lines of the one issued by Latin American and Caribbean broadcasters two years ago -- I just happen to have a copy here, if you think it will help you!

The American Heritage Dictionary defines animation first and foremost as **"the act, process, or result of imparting life, interest, spirit, motion, or activity."** It is because you impart life, interest, spirit, motion, and activity that we believe your industry truly has the power to make tremendous progress for children in the years to come. I hope this summit will help us to work together towards a brighter future for the world's children.