



File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0073

NOT FINAL

Address by Dr. Richard Jolly, Acting Executive Director
of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Third International Colloquium of Mayors, Defenders of Children

Paris, France
8 December 1994

	UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label
	 Rcf000611Q
Item #	CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1998-02518
ExR/Code:	CF/EXD/SP/1994-0073
Third International Colloquium of Mayors, Defenders of Children	
<i>Date Label Printed</i>	04-Nov-2002

Cover + 10 pp + 0 b



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

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1994-0073

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Address by Dr. Richard Jolly
Acting Executive Director
of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Third International Colloquium of
Mayors, Defenders of Children

Paris - 8 December 1994

In the quest for a better future for the world's children, "the voice of the cities must be heard!", said Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali last year. And the voice of the cities will indeed be heard over the next two days at this Third International Colloquium of Mayors, Defenders of Children. All of you are pioneers in this still-young initiative, and on behalf of UNICEF, I thank you for the activist impulse that brings you here today. UNICEF knows from pioneering efforts how strongly committed you are to making your cities more "child-friendly".

I am delighted to be here and honoured to address mayors from around the world. I speak today in my capacity as UNICEF Acting Executive Director, inasmuch as Jim Grant is recovering from surgery. I am pleased to report that he is recovering quite well, and that his inspiring 15-year tenure as Executive Director has just been extended another year by the Secretary-General. He sends all of you warm greetings and asked me to convey our deepest gratitude to Mayor Jacques Chirac -- a life-long Defender of Children -- and to the outstanding French National Committee for UNICEF, for hosting and helping to organize this important gathering.

And what a privilege to meet here in Paris, city of legends! For so many of us, Paris seems the ultimate, the city which exemplifies urban civilization. Far beneath Notre Dame are the traces of the post holes of the city's founders, who first crossed the Seine in tree trunk pirogues. Since that time, layer upon layer of life has left its mark on this city, from the gothic spires rising toward heaven to the crystal pyramid above the Louvre. But also there is the broken pottery -- and broken lives -- of the poor, and the art and literature which brought home to the world the contrasts between the heights and the depths of this reality. It was in Paris that in 1635 that the world's first free health clinic for the poor was established. Today, Mayor Chirac presides over a social assistance force 16,000 strong. We have much to learn from this city -- not just its beauty as the City of Light, but its functioning as a modern

cover + 10pp + 8b

metropolis grappling with the complexities and conflicts of modern life. I thank Mayor Chirac for his graciousness in welcoming us all.

This Third International Colloquium represents an important milestone in the "Mayors, Defenders of Children" movement. Launched in Dakar in 1992, this Initiative has now taken on global proportions. Mayors and municipal leaders from 45 countries of Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America and Oceania, gathered in Mexico City in July 1993 for the Second International Colloquium of Mayors, Defenders of Children. They reiterated their commitment to achieving the goals established at the World Summit for Children and called upon their counterparts around the world to do likewise, adapting National Programmes of Action (NPAs) for children to municipal realities.

The Mexico City colloquium was followed by a significant number of regional activities, and follow-up actions at country level. Two clear messages have reverberated through this series of mayors' meetings: First, that it is good economics -- and good politics, too -- to prioritize investments in the well-being of children and youth. Second, municipal governments are increasingly in a position to initiate important gains for children in spite of narrow mandates, tight budgets and shortage of trained personnel.

By coming to Paris to join in this colloquium, those of you in urban leadership positions bring to our deliberations rich experience in urban realities. Many of the burning problems of our times arise within the context of the metropolitan agglomerations, and it is within your own and other cities that we must solve them.

We should, during our time here together, soberly assess the complex nature and depth of those problems and come up with recommendations on how we, our nations and, indeed, the world can grapple with them so that children and their families stand a chance -- so that they enter the 21st century ready to play a productive role in their societies and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In my remarks this morning, I would like to present a brief overview of problems facing our cities; to remind us of some successful experiences and hopeful developments, and to end with specific suggestions for a child-friendly municipal agenda.

The urban crisis, North and South

Though our cities display civilization at its best, for many of our urban citizens cities represent cruelty and poverty at their worst, but for almost all, with an element of hope. Urban growth continues to be fuelled by the pull and prospect of city jobs and amenities and the push of stagnant rural economies.

Often the push is extreme -- forced exodus due to armed conflict, drought, famine and environmental degradation in the countryside, driving people into cities at an increasing rate. Especially this is true of Africa.

Urbanization of poverty

Whatever their hopes, the reality is that most of the population living under the poverty line in urban areas has little access to health, education, water or sanitation services. Especially vulnerable are women and children. At even higher risk are children in especially difficult circumstances -- first and foremost, so-called street children -- millions of whom eke out a marginal and precarious existence at the very heart of most of the world's cities.

As for the industrialized world, we have witnessed over the past five years a sudden and dramatic unraveling of social safety nets in the Central and Eastern European countries in transition, with cities displaying some of the sharpest increases in mortality, illness and setbacks for women and children.

In many long established industrial democracies -- including so-called "welfare states" -- we've seen recent attempts to shift the burden of responsibility for existing problems from the "haves" to the "have-nots," accompanied by sharp cutbacks in government services and benefits formerly viewed as entitlements. One in five children are now living in poverty in the United States, the highest proportion in 30 years. In that richest country in the world, there is a serious risk that government support for impoverished families and children will soon be further and drastically reduced. Again, it is in cities where the disparities are most glaring.

Thus, poverty is increasingly concentrated in the towns and cities of both North and South. In 1980, there were twice as many poor rural households as poor urban ones. But by the year 2000, more than one half of the absolute poor will be concentrated in urban centres. Nearly all cities have slums and pockets of poverty, and many developing country cities are overwhelmingly poor, with only a few prosperous areas.

Unemployment, underemployment and low wages, structural problems which have long assailed the urban poor, were exacerbated in the 1980s due to economic crises, especially in Africa and Latin America. The structural adjustment programmes adopted by most countries removed subsidies and price controls (which had previously helped the urban poor) and reduced employment opportunities in the largely urban government and parastatal sectors. Cuts in public spending, particularly in the social sectors, as well as cutbacks in public and industrial investment, drastically lessened economic opportunities in urban

areas. The brunt of adjustment has been borne by the urban poor, who were already suffering and therefore more vulnerable to crisis. One of the main outlets for these conflicting pressures has been the continued growth of the urban informal sector.

Women

Women are entering the paid workforce in ever-increasing numbers, but generally in low-paid, informal jobs, while male unemployment has been increasing. The high proportion of households headed by a single parent, usually the mother, both among the rural and urban poor, is due to many factors -- separation of work from home, the breakdown of family structures, dislocation and family separation caused by natural and man-made disasters or search for employment. Households headed by women are far more likely to be poor. Children in single-parent families are more prone to be malnourished and to drop out of school early; they are also more likely to be exploited at work and to become street children.

Children

A third of the developing world's children now live in urban areas; by the end of the decade, due to the unrelenting growth of cities, fully half of the children of developing countries will be city children. Of the 13 million under-five year olds who die of largely preventable causes each year, more than 30 per cent of them -- some 4 million children -- are dying needlessly year in and year out in urban and peri-urban areas.

Although urban areas are generally considered more favoured than rural areas with regard to social services and quality of life, the realities facing poor urban children and their families are anything but favourable. The lack of disaggregated data within urban centres tends to mask the dimensions of urban problems, although we all know that inequalities are more visible and notorious in our cities than anywhere else. Infant mortality rates are higher in slums than in the rest of the cities in which they are located -- they are twice as high in New York's impoverished Harlem than in the rest of the city where UNICEF is headquartered, for example.

Disparities

Similar contrasts occur for the incidence of illness, especially with regard to such environmentally-related diseases as diarrhoea, cholera, pneumonia, and tuberculosis, which are more prevalent in congested urban areas with poor housing, inadequate water supplies and sanitation, and severe air pollution. Inadequate standards and technologies in developing countries compound the problem, affecting all residents; but the poor, due to the location of their housing in under-served areas, suffer the most.

A survey of 35 developing countries showed that average access to safe water was 64 per cent in marginal urban areas and 67 per cent in rural areas. Even these figures do not reveal the true extent of intra-urban inequities: the poor pay 3 to 10 times more than other urban dwellers (whose consumption is subsidized by low rates) and spend up to 40 per cent of their earnings on water.

Urban malnutrition is a widespread problem. In one study, energy intake in slums was only one half to two thirds of what it was in other areas; another study found that up to 50 per cent of children in slum areas were malnourished, 10 per cent severely, and the incidence of anaemia was twice as high in slums as elsewhere.

Democratization and protest, decentralization and participation

Desperate needs and outrage over such inequalities force many people onto the streets. Some see this as chaos and anarchy. But it holds the potential for democratization and the participation of people beginning to solve their own urban problems. Which is it to be? One tends to trigger violence and repression; the other, mobilizing the people as constructive forces for their own betterment. It is in the pressure-cooker of cities that people are seeking their rights and abilities to participate in managing their own affairs.

This is the challenge which must call forth political will and political leadership. Cities need a response that looks affirmatively to the potential of people to become part of the solution, rather than be seen as the problem.

Many cities already have positive examples... creating conditions in which neighbours can meet their own and their families' needs for nutrition, health care and education... people investing their own productivity and economic advance.

Mayors on the frontline

Many mayors are -- and more can be -- on the frontline of the democratization and decentralization that characterize the final decade of the 20th century. UNICEF welcomes the chance to learn from your experiences and your efforts to work with the people, and to show us how the international community can offer better assistance. Many of you are Defenders of Children -- and others can be -- to join your local urban efforts to national and international programmes that will help turn around global and national downward trends. The solution of urban problems requires actions at the global and national level, but political leaders of cities can in turn stimulate governments to act boldly

on actions for children.

Proven successes

In setting a course for action and reform, let us not despair at the difficulties. Instead, we should take encouragement from a chronicle of proven successes that have advanced the well-being of humankind further in the past 50 years than in the previous 2000.

In the developing world over the last four or five decades, life expectancy has increased by about a third, infant and child death rates have been halved, the proportion of children starting school has risen from 50 per cent to 75 per cent, and the number of rural families with access to safe drinking water has risen from just 10 per cent to almost 60 per cent. Often this progress has been faster in urban than in rural areas. Mayors of a century ago would have been stunned by such rates of improvement.

The reasons for these successes vary from country to country. But a central feature of the most spectacular advances was leadership and vision. Key leaders believed in the importance of basic education, primary health care, nutrition, and improvement of the status of women. Children, the future of every nation, were made a top priority. And many countries -- and cities -- made clear public commitments to poverty reduction and incorporated goals toward this end in long- and short-term development plans.

Putting children first: goals and priorities

Your efforts as mayors today can build on a number of developments at the global and national level that I would like to outline briefly. The growing consensus on a new, human-centred development paradigm is a key factor. But more specifically related to children:

* **The Convention on the Rights of the Child**, approved by the UN General Assembly in November 1989. The Convention is a "Bill of Rights" for all children, and a code of binding obligations for governments, communities and parents with respect to the young. Mayors who are Defenders of Children should use the Convention as a framework for their efforts. In these times when the cold calculus of the marketplace is often cited as more important than human considerations, mayors need to boldly defend the rights of all children and youth to survival, protection and development.

* Secondly, the **World Conference on Education for All**, held

in Thailand in March of 1990. This has spurred a renewed global effort to ensure basic education for all, with an emphasis on providing access to children of the poor and especially to girls and women. Mayors, Defenders of Children must see to it that this highest-yield investment in the future prosperity of individuals and nations is made efficiently and cost-effectively, not only to reach all children, but also to provide quality education that is relevant to their lives.

* Thirdly, the **World Summit for Children**, in September 1990. This was the first truly global summit and the first in the chain of critically important UN conferences and summits that have been taking place and will continue during this decade. At the children's summit, goals were set for child health, nutrition, education and rights, to be achieved by the year 2000. Subsequently, 13 mid-decade goals were agreed to. Today, more than 120 countries -- accounting for some 90 per cent of the world's children -- have issued or drafted national programmes of action to reach both sets of goals.

* Perhaps the most remarkable development of interest to this audience is the **widespread decentralization of NPAs to provincial and municipal levels**. Action programmes at provincial and/or municipal levels are being developed in some 50 countries and planned in an additional 25.

High stakes

The stakes of our efforts are high. Achievement of the mid-decade goals for children would assure that the momentum toward accomplishing the full set of decade goals is maintained. At the same time we estimate that it would avert the deaths of an additional 2.5 million children annually by 1996. During the coming year, therefore, progress toward these mid-decade goals will be the main yardstick for assessing the seriousness of the larger decade-long effort. Mid-1994 assessments indicate that with sustained efforts a majority of countries should achieve a majority of the mid-decade goals.

During the next two days, we will be discussing the mid-decade goals in more detail. We hope this meeting will embrace them as enthusiastically as have previous mayors' meetings.

Six steps toward more child-friendly cities

For many nations, for many cities, these are "bad times", and children are not yet getting the "first call" on resources they need. There are difficult circumstances, with growing needs and shrinking budgets. At a time of fiscal austerity and cutbacks in government services, you mayors and city leaders know

that solutions are not to be found in doing "business as usual".

Allow me to highlight six approaches and actions that in UNICEF's experience will permit Mayors who are Defenders of Children to accelerate progress. Note that priority human goals are our starting-point -- if we start with taxes and budget cuts, the focus will be lost.

* First, **municipal programmes of action** to achieve the mid-decade and year 2000 goals for children and women are needed as central tools of social policy. They are the programmatic glue that unites the Mayors, Defenders of Children movement. In UNICEF's experience, goals, carefully considered and seriously adopted, constitute the strongest basis for social action. By setting measurable, time-bound goals, nations -- and their cities, too -- open the way for the focused action, social mobilization and monitoring measures necessary for sustainable progress. They provide accountability and a sense of mission. **It is our hope that as mayors and governors you will collectively and individually pledge that a comprehensive, goal-driven, multisectoral and community-oriented plan of action for children is soon drafted and operational in your city or province. And why not create an inter-agency body to coordinate and support government and NGO efforts for children in each province and municipality?**

* Second, a municipal "plan of attack" is needed, targeting one geographical sector after another for improvements in infrastructure and service delivery. The existence of a city-wide plan allows for the rational allocation of resources and the mobilization of local communities for improving conditions and services in successive operational areas, until universal coverage is achieved. UNICEF's long experience with Urban Basic Services programmes has shown that what has prevented many excellent urban programmes from going to scale is the lack of consistent support from government and the private sector, and the lack of complementarity between macro-economic and community development policies.

* Thirdly, new forms of participation must be found. People, and especially the poor, and especially women, have enormous energy and motivation if they find they can make improvements in their lives. Neighbours must be included in organized ways of working to provide the essentials of life for themselves and their families. **Participation is the key** to making urban basic services work. The anomie and lack of social solidarity affecting most crowded cities must be overcome through the common pursuit of widely shared goals. Political leadership can make the crucial difference in igniting and sustaining a sense of shared purpose among a

city population.

* Fourth. **Partnership between the grassroots and urban leadership** is needed. Many of the systemic issues -- water supply and distribution, sanitation and land tenure, employment and credit -- cannot be resolved by even the most enterprising and hard-working urban communities on their own. Improvements at the grassroots will not be sustainable, and will not go beyond being mere band-aids, until new ways are found for poor communities to help themselves by working with government and with the private sector, to provide the infrastructure and supportive macro environment that is needed. The regulatory environment must encourage and support self-help, and entrepreneurship, rather than stifle the informal sector, grassroots initiatives and coping strategies.

* Fifth. All of this requires **better systems for collecting data** regarding the poor and vulnerable population and their basic needs. Only on the basis of such information can sound policies and plans be developed, progress tracked and programmes evaluated. But the lack of full-blown monitoring systems need not be an obstacle to action. Experience has shown that effective programmes can proceed on the basis of rough data obtained at low cost with community participation, while efforts are made to develop more sophisticated information and monitoring systems.

* Sixth and finally, **restructuring of government spending** will also be required, a shifting of resources in favour of low-cost infrastructure and services for the many rather than high-cost services for the few. Even when public expenditure has to be cut, a reordering of priorities can still permit the continued protection of the vulnerable. In urban settings, effective community involvement and use of low-cost technologies can ensure that improvement and extension of priority infrastructure services and vital services -- clean water, sanitation and sewage, and garbage collection, primary health care, basic education and nutrition -- do not fall victim to fiscal austerity.

In summary, being a Mayor, Defender of Children means being the mayor of all children, including and especially poor children.

From outrage to action

There is simply no reason, on the threshold of the 21st century, for children to have to live in and work the streets of our cities. It is a collective shame for humankind that so many people -- so many entire families -- remain homeless in the shadow of modern skyscrapers and high-rise apartment buildings.

It does not speak well about the quality of our species that for millions of human beings basic health care and education, safe drinking water and adequate sanitation are still luxuries they can't afford instead of rights they can effectively claim. All of us are properly outraged by this state of affairs -- that is why we have come to this colloquium -- but now we must harness moral indignation to practical action.

Cities are increasingly the new frontier for social progress on the eve of the third millennium. Mayors like those of you gathered in this hall can be at the cutting edge of a new world order -- fairer and more humane -- now struggling to be born.

Mayors Defenders of Children can pave the way for more humane and more ethical development. I wish you the best of luck in your deliberations over the next two days and urge you, once more, to return home with renewed energy and determination to implement bold, visionary and practical programmes of action for your children.