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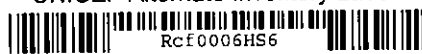
Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
World Conference on Education for All
"Education As If the Child Mattered"

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BY

JAMES P. GRANT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)

TO THE

WORLD CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION FOR ALL

EDUCATION AS IF THE CHILD MATTERED

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EDUCATION AS IF THE CHILD MATTERED

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Just over a year ago in February 1989, my colleagues from UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank and I met and came to one conclusion as we reviewed the state of education and the prospects for the 1990's. Our conclusion was that the numbers and proportion of children in the world still without the benefit of primary education and adults without access to basic learning opportunities were simply unconscionable. It was even more intolerable that at the current rate of progress in basic education, the global situation would not significantly change even by the end of the century. In fact, there had been a decline in the last several years in the rate of primary school enrollment in a number of Sub-Saharan countries.

We agreed that in the 1990s there had to be a major acceleration in the rate of progress in basic education, in both quantitative expansion and in enhancing the quality and content of learning; that there had to be truly a quantum leap in the progress of basic education. Not only is education a basic human right, but we now know of the strong correlation between basic education and birth rates and child mortality rates; and between achievement of literacy, numeracy and basic life knowledge and economic growth. The countries and regions with the most rapid and healthy economic growth of the post World War II era, e.g. South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan have all given early priority and attention to basic education.

The rightness and timeliness of our conclusion has been vocally reaffirmed in the speeches here at Jomtien of the past two days. Just yesterday, World Bank President Barber Conable gave us an impressive list of citations including Lord Buddha, Plato, Adam Smith, Paulo Freire, Gunnar Myrdal and Nelson Mandela on the centrality of education to our civilization, culture and economics.

The rightness and timeliness of our conclusion and the urgency of a quantum leap in the progress of basic education has been reaffirmed by the United Nations' adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November 1989. The Convention asserts every child's right to education, the states' duty to "make primary education compulsory and available to all" and the need for international cooperation to ensure this right.

The rightness and timeliness of our conclusion has been further affirmed by the decision of Presidents Mubarak of Egypt, Salinas of Mexico and Traori of Mali and Prime Ministers Banazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Carlsson of Sweden and Malrooney of Canada to convene the first ever East-West-North-South World Summit for Children. Acting on their behalf, United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar has just issued the invitation to all Heads of State or Government to meet this coming September 29th and 30th in New York. UNICEF has been asked to serve as the Secretariat. Advancing education, particularly achievement of basic literacy, numeracy and life knowledge will be a major agenda item, and the conclusions of this Conference will be presented to the Summit.

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We in UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank are in full agreement with the broad view of basic education presented in the draft Declaration and the Framework for Action. This broad view embraces several mutually complementary elements which we will be supporting - a common minimum level of learning achievement for all children in literacy, numeracy and basic life skills; adult literacy and widened access for all through all channels of communication to essential knowledge, skills and values for better living in particular cultural contexts; and early childhood education and development through appropriate and affordable means.

We four are committed to increasing our financial support for basic and primary education. The World Bank has announced an increase in education lending from US\$ 750 million to US\$ 1.5 billion annually in the next three years, of which an increasing percentage will go to basic education. UNESCO has already doubled its allocation for basic education in the current biennium over the previous one. UNDP has stated its willingness at least to double its support to education providing governments request so.

UNICEF on its part is proposing doubling of its support to basic education by the mid-1990s, to 15 per cent of total programme support, with a further increase to 20 per cent by 2000. Since the total UNICEF programme is expected to continue to grow in real terms over the 1990s, the proposed increase amounts to a growth from less than US\$ 50 million currently to more than US\$ 100 million per year by the mid-1990s and a quadrupling to some US\$ 200 million by 2000. We expect many bilateral and multilateral assistance agencies and NGOs, 18 of which are helping sponsor this Conference, to increase significantly their allocations as well.

Experience has long shown that when primary education achievement is less than universal, those left out are overwhelmingly the children of the poor and other disadvantaged social groups, especially girls and women. If empowerment of people through knowledge is an important goal of basic education, then there is a strong case for "affirmative action" in support of expanding basic education for girls and women, the victims of age-old discrimination in most societies. This is an article of faith for UNICEF, because we know from our own experience that all the gains that have been made in the past decade in saving the lives of millions of children and improving the health and well-being of children and mothers cannot be sustained and cannot be advanced further without primary education, literacy and basic knowledge for better living for girls and women.

Universal Primary Education: The Cutting Edge

As we come today to the mid-point of this Conference, we must ask ourselves what difference this event in Jomtien will make in fulfilling the goal of meeting basic learning needs for all. We cannot let the magnificent resurgence of spirit and commitment that this conference has spurred fade away. UNICEF's experience in primary health care

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and child survival efforts teaches us that in dealing with a complex, multifaceted development phenomenon, it is necessary to forge a cutting edge that can penetrate the multi-layered obstacles to progress. We need to find the most crucial of that which is doable and do it well - achieve success that builds credibility and confidence for further success on a broader front.

It is our proposition that, within the framework of a broad vision of basic education and while pressing forward to meet basic learning needs of all segments of the population, a special concentrated effort in universal primary education - in achieving a minimum level of learning for the great majority of children in literacy, numeracy and basic life skills by the Year 2000 - can and need be made. It would make strategic sense to do so especially in countries, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where primary education for children lags far behind other regions of the world. Success in primary education can be the cutting edge for opening the way for success in broader and more complex education effort including other elements of basic education.

UNICEF, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNDP are in agreement that a special effort should be made to ensure that by the Year 2000 virtually all children are achieving a common early level of achievement in literacy, numeracy and basic life skills. We will take a lead in seeking to assure that any least developed or low income countries effectively committed to this goal of achieving universal primary education by the Year 2000 will not lack for essential external inputs of papers, textbooks and other basic learning and teaching materials. Formal primary schools, non-formal programmes, use of media and non-governmental organizations will all be supported and promoted in reaching this goal.

The commitment by UNICEF and other international partners to a focus on universalization of primary education could have the following characteristics:

- (a) helping countries achieve the goal of universal access to primary education, which serves as the cutting edge of a broader effort in basic education for all,
- (b) emphasizing in primary education the achievement, as defined by each country, of a basic level of literacy, numeracy and life skills by an early age, such as 11 or 12, by at least, say, 80-85 per cent of the children, and monitored by establishing a system of assessment,
- (c) providing, a certain amount, say up to \$5 per additional pupil where it is essential, in order to ensure that no country in Sub-Saharan Africa or low income countries elsewhere lack the books, exercise books and other material

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needed to support the expansion and quality improvements required to achieve the basic education goal.

- (d) emphasizing, as appropriate to each country situation, the special need to reach out to girls and women, and to other disadvantaged groups in order to remove disparity in access, participation and achievement as early as possible.
- (e) supporting and promoting, as much as possible, the other elements of basic education, including early childhood development, adult literacy, as well as wider access to basic knowledge for living through systematic use of the mass media and all other channels of communication as these reinforce and create a favourable environment for primary education success.

We urge all participants in this Conference to join in a grand alliance to ensure the success of this unprecedented effort for universal basic and primary education.

All countries will and must work simultaneously toward all of the complementary and mutually supportive goals and targets listed in the draft Framework for Action prepared for this Conference. The efforts must continue in adult illiteracy, expansion of early childhood development activities, or increasing the use of informal education channels - i.e., media, people's organizations, religious groups, etc. - to help bridge the knowledge gap. It is a question of striking a balance and some phasing of priorities among different elements of basic education. I am convinced that if we band together and achieve significant headway in one important aspect of EFA, the success of that effort will lead the way for broader and more complex education efforts. And universal primary education is just such a vital and feasible goal; we neglect it at our peril.

Setting and Assessing Learning Achievement Levels

One key issue on which we must focus if we are seriously to pursue the goal of universal primary education - or, indeed, any of the EFA targets - is the minimum common level of learning that must be achieved by a large majority of the learners, if not by all.

A difficult aspect of moving seriously on universal primary education will be testing the learning level or performance of individual learners as well as assessing the performance of the system. The ultimate goal of a universal primary education programme is that children are educated: that they are literate and numerate, and that they have life skills. How do we devise a measure of the outputs with a criterion-based, objective measure of learning gains? Who would assess the effectiveness and how? I believe that

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enough progress has been made in sampling techniques, educational evaluation and learning assessment to enable us to design and introduce in each country simple and widely applicable systems of assessment of performance by both individual learners and the learning systems.

The Mass-Media and the Third Channel of Education

One key effort complementary to the focus on achieving universal primary education must be to multiply exponentially the use of the media and all other low-cost means of effective communication for widening the access for people to basic knowledge for living. This "third channel" of education, as distinct from formal and non-formal education, consists of both modern and traditional methods of mass communication and should be exploited as a powerful complement to both.

The third channel, in addition to transmitting life-sustaining and life-enhancing knowledge, can be used to mobilize a society to participate in a basic education effort. Thus, on one hand media, non-governmental organizations, religious groups, and community organizations might all join forces in building a school facility or helping families overcome obstacles to keeping their children in school.

On another hand, the third channel can be used as a direct vehicle for educational messages - to help disseminate knowledge which is vital to people's health and well-being and to motivate action. Besides the well-acknowledged revolution which has occurred in the capacity to communicate among all of the world's people, another dramatic change has occurred in the amount of information there is to communicate. As Dr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, told us so eloquently at the opening of this Conference: "Never before in history has there been such a gap between the knowledge that could empower people and improve their well-being, and its actual availability to those who most need to know."

Where there used to be small hills of knowledge, today there are veritable mountains of knowledge - mountains growing taller with each passing decade. And much of that knowledge is relevant to improving, and even saving, people's lives. For example, for 20 years a cure has been available for the number one killer of young children - diarrhoeal dehydration - which costs only 7 cents to make and administer at home. Yet 10 years ago, fewer than 1 per cent of families were using oral rehydration therapy when the occasion arose, and still today, fewer than 50 per cent use it - and 7,000 children die daily as a result. Similarly, after a herculean effort in the 1980s, more than 90 per cent of the World's children now have access to full immunization but only 70 per cent are fully immunized - and another 7,000 children die daily as a result. More parents need to know

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that these means are available, and how to use them, and such messages can be shared in a variety of ways. The potential of social mobilization has just begun to be realized in the field of child health. During the last half of the 1980s, for example, country-after-country mobilized all sections of society to immunize all of the children of the nation against the six main vaccine-preventable diseases and to spread the knowledge of oral rehydration therapy. Because of these efforts, the lives of more than 10,000 children are now being saved every day.

In respect of most of the critical problems of today's world -- be it the scourge of AIDS, ethnic violence and intolerance, the menace of drugs, protection of the environment, or the challenge of promoting inter-racial harmony in South Africa -- an educational process reaching out to all segments of society through all channels of communication is the key to the solution.

The Contribution of NGO's

Non-governmental organizations, - local, national and international ones - have proven their extraordinary capacity at catalyzing people for self-reliant development. Serving as facilitators, usually at community and local levels, they help create and sustain a dialogue at the grassroots. This dialogue enables people to articulate their own learning needs, to decide how they themselves can achieve them and to identify what human and material resources they themselves can mobilize and which to seek from government or others. NGOs enable people's groups to gain access to skills and management training, resources and information. Governments would do well to give far greater attention than most currently do to utilize more fully the creativity effectiveness and commitment of NGOs for the empowerment of people. They must broaden the political space for NGOs to function effectively.

It is because I firmly believe in the vitality of NGOs that I am delighted to see such a large number of NGOs present at this conference, many of their representatives having pioneered personally in some of the most effective and innovative approaches to reaching children, youth, women, the disabled, and the illiterate and the poor. I am happy that they and others will be able to tell their own stories and analyze for and with us how it all happened and tell us in the international community as well as governments what we can do to help.

UNICEF's conviction that NGOs are among society's most dynamic partners has been amply demonstrated in the social mobilization efforts around child survival protection and development activities.

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Mobilization of New Resources

Another issue which we must seriously address is the mobilization of new resources. If we are going to commit ourselves to such an ambitious goal, how much is it going to cost and how will the necessary resources be found? Over the 1980s, the share of aid donor resources going to all forms of education has fallen from 17 to 10 per cent, with only a small fraction going to basic and primary education. If we are serious about EFA, or about universal primary education, we must mobilize the political will internationally to restore education's share in total aid, increase the proportion going to basic education and deal more effectively with the debt crisis in many countries, particularly in Africa and Latin America. It is difficult to imagine how countries in the grip of a crushing debt burden can mobilize necessary resources for achieving EFA goals.

With regard to resources, our estimate of the needs in the 72 low income and lower middle income countries is that it will take, on average, an additional US\$5 billion per year in local and international resources over the next decade for these countries to ensure access to basic learning opportunity for all children. A study commissioned by UNICEF and UNESCO which analyses these figures will be presented in Friday morning's round-table.

Will mobilization of this large sum be possible? I am utterly convinced it can be and will be, if we mobilize the political commitment nationally and internationally behind the vision to achieve the goal. The annual cost by the mid-1990s is roughly equivalent to the amount the World now devotes to military expenditures every two days, or to the total of the USA's annual expenditure on cigarette advertising and the amount Soviet Union spends each year on vodka. We will need, country-by-country, to include in the goal-setting analyses, identification of the specific steps and options which can make it possible. Each assistance agency must examine what more it might do in the 1990s. The four sponsoring agencies have sought to start this process in their statements in Jomtien.

Much of the needed resources can be found from national and assistance budgets, both from restructuring within education budgets and giving higher shares of national budget and external assistance to basic education. Debt relief might be combined with additional education support, as called for by Presidents Moi of Kenya, and Borja of Ecuador and others. Surely also the improved climate of peace and resolution of conflict should yield support to education from the dividends of reduced military expenditure, nationally and internationally. And the popular commitment of NGOs in the industrial countries can be encouraged and built upon to provide yet further support.

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Accepting the EFA Challenge: Defining Our Era

Gathered in this room is an influential cross-section of political figures, the educational community and communicators which, in collaboration with a vast network of new alliances, has the capacity to design how education is conducted, and to what extent it will be implemented, in the future. You - we - have the potential at this Conference - indeed, we have the responsibility -to write an important part of the next chapter in the history of human progress: the "Education for All" Chapter.

But what will we do when we leave this conference? We could pack our bags, leave for home, inspired a bit but essentially return to the tasks at hand. Alternatively, we could - and I believe we should - set in motion to carry forward the commitments and opportunity presented to us into practical action.

Each country team could call together a national group, including the NGO's, and ask how the next steps can be taken to develop the framework of action for setting the goals and mobilizing the resources as required. Unless this is done, there will be no basis for action, nationally or internationally. If and when it is done, I pledge that my UNICEF colleagues will have received personal instructions from me to join in and offer whatever support they can. And I believe that our co-sponsors will join in as appropriate.

Internationally, parallel action could also be set in motion, to explore with bilateral donor agencies and others, including international NGO's, how the additional external resources could be found - by mobilizing new resources or restructuring existing resources. I believe an international meeting to discuss the specific of international support should be held without delay; and I am glad that the meeting of cosponsors already is addressing how this might be done.

These very moments in Jomtien have the potential to be the turning point in the field of basic education. It is really up to us to determine, through our actions, this week and beyond whether that potential is realized. It is a formidable challenge. Can we take the decisions and make the commitments to bring the benefits of modern knowledge - through education - to all? For the future of our children - and of our world - together, we can do nothing less.