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Message by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
United Nations Council for Namibia

Windhoek, Namibia
9 April 1990



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Windhoek - 9 April 1990

Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Namibia,
Your Excellency the Representative of the Secretary General,
The Chairman of the Senate of the United Nations Institute for Namibia and
Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa,
The President of the United Nations Council for Namibia,
Representatives of the United Nations Specialized Agencies,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am most pleased to address a message to this august council at the joyful and indeed momentous occasion which has prompted your gathering in Windhoek.

Your plenary meeting here occurs at the culmination of over two decades of protracted systematic efforts to resolve one of the most intractable complexities of modern international history. The freeing of Namibia through peaceful negotiations has been an achievement that will go down in the annals of history of international cooperation as one of the most exemplary of the latter part of the 20th century.

Over the past decade the United Nations Children's Fund has worked closely with Namibians in exile both in Angola and Zambia. It is indeed a significant achievement to note that, among Namibians in exile, immunization coverage among children and expectant mothers was universal and malnutrition and disease levels among the refugee population in the Angolan and Zambian camps

was among the lowest in Africa. UNICEF is proud to have been a part of this struggle to protect the lives of children, women and other vulnerable groups in exile.

UNICEF, with its special concern for issues related to children, is most encouraged that the Government of Namibia has announced that its priorities for this first year of independence will be health, education and agriculture. It is our firm hope and fondest wish for a strong future for Namibia that, in each of these three areas, the needs of all Namibians will be addressed in this first formative year. Thus, in health, we look for a strengthened primary health care system, with a special emphasis on maternal and child health. It is most gratifying that an expanded programme of immunization has already begun - belatedly joining the Africa-wide effort to achieve in each country by December 1990 the goals of immunizing at least 75 per cent of under ones against the six main child killing diseases. Similarly, it bodes well for the future that plans are being solidified for basic maternal and child health training and that Facts for Life and other health education materials are already being used. We anticipate the country's reunification of fragmented health services and their extension to rural areas, with massive training of middle and basic level workers, and the building and strengthening of health infrastructure throughout the country.

In education, again, UNICEF is encouraged by the prospects for education for all Namibians within a discreet time frame. The World Conference on Education for All, which gathered the world's leading education experts and policy makers last month in Jomtien, Thailand, placed a high priority on universal primary education by the year 2000 as the cutting edge for broader education goals. In Namibia, might primary education - a defined level of literacy, numeracy and basic life skills - be achievable for virtually all children during this decade? If an effective groundwork is done in this first year of independence, we at UNICEF are convinced that this is an achievable goal - and one that will play a major role in building a strong future for Namibia. Your population must interact and compete in a complex world, and like all countries, yours needs an educated populace to keep pace. Surely we cannot afford to deny an education to the potential leaders of tomorrow.

In agriculture, the emphasis on subsistence farming, and building the nation's capacity to feed itself is a most positive direction. The protection of household food security is clearly of primary importance to the health and well-being of children. The nutrition of children must be a serious concern in designing plans for the future of agriculture in Namibia.

While addressing ourselves to these important concerns we should not forget the underlying issue of peace. If peace had not prevailed over the forces of war and destruction here in Namibia this gathering could not be held in Windhoek today. The United Nations and the Office of Secretary-General in particular should therefore be commended for their tireless work toward lasting peace for Namibia. Equally important are the governments that were also critical to this realization of peace. We join with those who commend them.

Your Excellencies, the long years of work that the Council of Namibia undertook to protect the people and natural resources of this noble country have indeed been brought to a joyful culmination in a free and independent Namibia. I would not have completed my task today if I did not congratulate the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group, UNTAG, and the people of Namibia for a gallant job during the transition to Independence.

The doors to the future of Namibia are wide open - a future that promises a healthy, well-educated and egalitarian Namibia. The United Nations Children's Fund is committed to contribute to this future. May the seeds of the work of the Council of Namibia and, indeed, the entire United Nations system, fall on fertile ground. May Namibia have peace and thrive.