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Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to
His Holiness John Paul II

31 May 1990



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Address of the Executive Director of
the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), James P. Grant,
to His Holiness John Paul II
on 31 May 1990

Your Holiness,

May I address to Your Holiness heartfelt thanks for granting UNICEF the honour of an audience. This audience comes at a moment of great hope for the world's children and for the world as a whole, when many things are turning for the better and fill us with the expectation that at least some of the plagues still tormenting humankind may diminish, or perhaps even cease completely. It also comes at a moment in which the collaboration of the Catholic Church and UNICEF is greater than ever on the common cause of improving the well-being of children, and in which, more and more, the voice of the Church is gratefully acknowledged as one of partnership and friendliness. It is also a message of great encouragement and help in our endeavours.

The recent and most timely accession by the Holy See of the Convention on the Rights of the Child exemplifies the interest and determination of the Catholic Church to protect children worldwide. It also serves as a moral and political example to all countries, and will no doubt encourage them to ratify and implement this extraordinary instrument of peace and civilization at an early date. We now hope that the Convention will become an international building instrument by the time of the World Summit for Children at the United Nations on 29 and 30 September of this year.

When I was privileged to meet with Your Holiness first in 1982, we discussed both the darkening times for hundreds of millions of children and the opportunities for tremendously improving their well being, if only the countries of the world would choose the right priorities in their favour.

The World Summit for Children is an unprecedented, historic event which, for the first time in history, will bring together world leaders to discuss one topic - children. This can certainly be viewed as a sign of the times that are changing for the better. Recent examples of vision and tolerance

have allowed us to talk of children as a bridge to peace. The concept of First Call for Children in bad times as well as good is slowly taking root, and makes us hope that the time is indeed coming when the world will no longer passively accept the unnecessary loss in children lives equivalent to an Armenia earthquake every day. The Summit will greatly contribute to the evolution of this new consciousness. I thank Your Holiness in advance for the part that the Holy See and the Catholic Church will have in supporting this process in the days and weeks before the Summit as well as at the time of the Summit itself.

When I met again with Your Holiness in 1984, together with the delegates to UNICEF's Executive Board, Your Holiness reminded us of the word of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that all which will be done to children in His name will be done to Him. The Summit may certainly be seen as a good step in this direction.

The support of the Church to the cause of children and to UNICEF is most precious to all of us, who are trying to give the best of our intelligence and of our strength to the cause of child survival, protection and development. We speak of a Grand Alliance for Children, in which UNICEF is but a small, albeit at times catalytic, member. We need the help and partnership of the great members of this Alliance. We at UNICEF strive to achieve a noble cause of helping children and are grateful for the privilege of the support and interest of Your Holiness and of the Catholic Church.

Thank you again.