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Speaking Points for Policy Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
35th Annual Meeting of National Committees for UNICEF

Barcelona, Spain
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I. Greetings

I am most pleased to welcome Her Majesty, Queen Sofia; the Catalanian authorities; members of National Committees for UNICEF; colleagues and friends. Her Majesty has distinguished herself as a patron of the Spanish National Committee for UNICEF, and we are honoured by her joining us today. It is good to be back in Spain, a country which has traditionally given high priority to meeting the needs of children, as evidenced in relatively low child mortality rates, and which has grown significantly economically and culturally, even since the last time our Annual Meeting was held in Spain - in 1980 in Madrid.

There is a sense, in gathering at the Annual Meeting, of meeting with the inner circle of an increasingly vast and important Grand Alliance for Children. We regret the loss, within this inner circle, of our good friend Robert Nesdale, who died in December.

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II. Time of change

This 35th Annual Meeting of the National Committees occurs at a crucial moment for the children of the world. The beginning of the last decade of the 20th century is not only a great symbolic moment, inviting a dramatic last chance to crystalize the legacy of our century to the next. It is in reality a time of phenomenal change and opportunity. In any century, only twice or thrice does the possibility of fundamental and essential improvement in our global situation lie close at hand. Now is such a time. Whereas often great opportunities must be painfully won from the anguish of war or drastic economic depression, the dynamism of this moment in history is born against a background of relative peace.

- warming of the cold war and easing of East/West tensions
- sweeping changes in Eastern Europe
- progress on disarmament with its promise of a significant peace dividend
- joyous birth of a new nation, Namibia, achieved at a time of considerable experience with independence by other African nations
- visible progress toward dismantling of apartheid
- easing of regional tensions

III. How to seize the opportunity for children? It is still sadly true that some 40,000 young children die each day, the majority of them from causes for which we have long-since discovered low-cost cures and preventions. These tragic and unnecessary deaths are but one indication of the disproportionate burden of suffering borne by the most vulnerable among us, especially children and women.

Synergism

Fortunately, this open moment in history holds the potential of ushering in the most important breakthroughs for children ever experienced. Momentum has gathered at a rapidly increasing pace in recent years on a number of child-related issues. Today, a critical juncture has been reached. A dynamic synergism is accelerating progress on child-related issues at a rate that would simply not be possible for any one issue alone.

It would be difficult to say which issue started it all. We are at a point now where key initiatives are becoming mutually reinforcing - they are accelerating each other.

CSD/UCI

Thus, for example, progress in child survival and development (CSD) activities, and especially the massive effort and success toward achieving universal child immunization (UCI) against the six main child-killing diseases by the end of 1990, has brought many new participants into involvement in child-related issues, from Heads of State and Government to religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, the media, school teachers and more.

-- coverage at the end of 1989 reached 71 per cent globally - a major achievement in itself, considering that only some 20 per cent of the world's children were immunized at the beginning of the decade, before acceleration efforts began. If we can maintain the current

momentum (and take full advantage of the forthcoming World Summit for Children), immunization coverage will reach 80 per cent globally by the end of 1990 - an achievement which will prevent more than 3 million infant and child deaths annually.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

- The vast new alliance of participants in the UCI effort, once familiar with an all-out effort on behalf of children, became predisposed to take very seriously the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I must say that I myself, in 1979, did not think that the Convention would come into being during my lifetime. And while success in CSD and UCI gave us confidence that the seemingly overwhelming task of bringing the Convention into force could actually be accomplished, new attention to children's rights stirred by activities in support of the Convention in turn raised people's awareness that providing health services for children was not just a nice thing to do: it is the obligation of adult society.

- The Convention would never have come as far as it has without the active involvement of the National Committees, and it would never be ratified by the 20 nations necessary to bring it into force without you. And there is every hope and expectation that, with efforts on many fronts, that will be accomplished before the World Summit for Children on 29 and 30 September. It is you who breathe life into the Convention by insisting that children's rights are met, and that children's issues rise to their rightful place, high on political agendas throughout the world.

Each of these issues - CSD and the Convention - was accelerated by the momentum of the other.

Education for All

-- On another front, the experience and credibility gained through CSD and UCI successes have given the confidence to move ahead on the basic education front. I think we are all aware of a quantum leap in commitment to basic education that has come out of the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand in March. Especially significant at Jomtien was the strong and widespread commitment to universal primary education by the year 2000 - to achieving a minimum level of learning for the great majority of children in literacy, numeracy and basic life skills - with the clear understanding that levels of achievement, rather than enrollment figures, must be used as assessment criteria. I might note that the new level of global commitment to basic education for all is vividly reflected in greatly increased allocations proposed for education in the coming years and a new partnership by the four principal sponsors: the UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. For our part, UNICEF plans to increase funding from 7 per cent of programme expenditure in 1989 to 15 per cent by 1993, and to 25 per cent by the year 2000.

It is noteworthy that the lessons learned in the health field through using UCI as a cutting edge of primary health care inspired the commitment to universal primary education for all by 2000. In this mounting synergistic interaction, progress in education can be counted on for a profound sustainable contribution to children's health, the assurance that their rights are met, and maintaining their rightful place, high on the world's political agendas.

Goals for children and development in the 1990s

- On another front, credibility and experience gained through CSD and UCI, movement in the education field, in water, and new awareness of our obligations to ensure that children's rights are met have all contributed the impetus and the confidence required for experts and policy makers to come to consensus on a challenging yet feasible set of "goals for children and development in the 1990s". The goals are the result of an extraordinarily extensive consultative process at country, regional and international levels. They establish priorities among what is do-able for children. They represent groundwork laid by the world's leading experts, and it is hoped that each country will use them to arrive at an appropriate set of priority goals for their own needs in the main sectors of health, education (with an emphasis on gender equity), water and sanitation and nutrition.

-- The main priority goals among what is do-able for children between now and the year 2000 are:

- 1) reduction of infant and under-5 mortality rates in all countries by one-third or to 50 and 70 per 1,000 live births respectively, whichever is less;
- 2) reduction of maternal mortality rates by half;
- 3) reduction of malnutrition among under-5s by half;
- 4) universal access to safe drinking water and to sanitary means of excreta disposal;
- 5) universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school age children;
- 6) reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) to at least half its 1990 level with emphasis on female literacy.
- 7) improved protection of children in especially difficult circumstances.

World Summit for Children

Last but hardly least among these key areas is progress toward the World Summit for Children. A new status for issues related to children and an increasing awareness of how very much is possible on behalf of children for so little cost, both of which have grown out of all of these efforts on UCI and primary health care, the Convention, and primary education, have contributed greatly toward progress on the Summit. How truly remarkable that the first-ever global summit of leaders from North, South,

East and West should devote their full agenda to child-related issues. It indicates a major shift in the wind. The Summit in turn is now having an accelerating effect on both the ratification and implementation of the Convention and on CSD activities, especially UCI, as world leaders focus on their countries' accomplishments in these arenas in preparation for their own participation at the historic gathering. And if fact, as preparations for the Summit and its follow-up progress, it is becoming clear that it is the boost which the Summit will give to action on behalf of the children which now brings within human reach the goals and strategies for children in the 1990s (which gained their initial momentum from CSD activities). While each of the goals is, in itself, feasible during this decade, it will take a significant restructuring of societal behaviour to accomplish them all - a restructuring of the magnitude that could perhaps only be triggered by an immediate global coalition such as that signaled by the Summit. The import of this synergistic interaction of efforts is reflected in the projection that, if the goals are realized, the lives of 50 million children will be saved during this decade.

For all of us who are committed to the survival, protection and development of the children of the world, the big challenge at this unique moment in history is how to make the most of the Summit and its follow-up. How do we use it to take a quantum leap for children? How do we accelerate each other's agendas to take the fullest advantage of the Grand Alliance for Children?

Immediately following the Summit, governments will be committed to a new plan of action. How do we bolster their commitment, influence their prioritizing, and develop a powerful common front in each country? Public opinion should be far more supportive than usual, and it should, for example, be easier than usual to raise money for child-related issues. It should be easier to mobilize. Are we ready to find and seize the opportunities in this historic moment of change?

IV. UNICEF and National Committees - stronger ties for the future

Accelerated activities on all of these fronts has made increasing demands on both UNICEF and the National Committees, and it is noteworthy that the Committees have continued to carry on their normal work while responding to growing demands. In 1989 you raised more than US\$138 million (including GCO) or about 20 per cent of UNICEF's global budget. In the coming year there is understandably more of a need than usual for effective fundraising, in order to take best advantage of the Summit and its follow-up. UNICEF looks toward working with the National Committees increasingly on the fund-raising side, and we anticipate stronger communications - both ways - than we have experienced in the past.

New solidarity with industrialized countries and the implementation on the Convention on the Rights of the Child everywhere, can be expected to propel National Committees to new or expanded roles. This "inner circle" of the Grand Alliance for Children has a crucial role to play in interacting with

specialized volunteers and with NGOs, and I am pleased to see that this meeting includes a "Volunteer Forum" that will focus on key issues. Experience sharing, coordinating views and the strengthening of consultation capacities are among External Relations issues to be discussed with Marco Vianello-Chiodo and Victor Soler-Sala on Thursday.

UNICEF's role in Eastern Europe is of course an issue of keen interest to those of us gathered here. During this massive shift toward more market oriented economies, great vigilance is needed to the basic situation of children. The current condition in which many children live in some central and eastern European countries is already extremely troubling. As you know, UNICEF's Executive Board authorized the organization to spend up to US\$1 million each year for the next three years in Eastern Europe. We have sent survey missions in, and we intend to respond accordingly.

It is most important to emphasize that emergencies in Europe, changes close to our borders or in our countries, and dramatic situations for children in industrialized countries should not divert our attention from the Third World. As Begum Nusrat Bhutto, the mother of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, said in an address in New York recently:

"Development and democracy cannot be severed - they are the two faces of the same currency of freedom.

"Our political opposition to tyranny alone will not solve the problems of the people.

"Tyranny stifles freedom, yes. But so does hunger.

"Tyranny chokes creativity, yes. But so does illiteracy.

"Tyranny denies opportunity, yes. But not as much as infant mortality.

"Our political agenda cannot exist for its own end, but rather it must exist to implement a social agenda.

"At the heart of that social agenda is education, housing and health for a people who have paid with their own blood...for the privilege to be free."

And in a sense this, it seems to me, is a central challenge as we look to the period ahead.

One of the points that Mrs. Bhutto's remarks brings home to us is that, in the midst of all the new attention to Eastern Europe, and the desire and the responsibility to be nurturing and supportive there, it is important that we do not neglect our relations on other fronts. The opening of new doors to the East must not be the occasion for slamming shut still more doors to the South by devoting all our attention and all our supportive resources to helping encourage change in Eastern Europe. We must not turn our backs on the great masses of the world's population living in abject poverty and near hopelessness in the developing countries.

But how can we use this new warming of East-West relations to have a positive impact on all countries of the world? How can we guard against the possibility that the East-West reconciliation could have detrimental effects on some of the more socially and economically vulnerable nations? Certainly, we see on many fronts today a creeping benign neglect toward Latin America and toward Africa in particular.

What are the opportunities for us to make this an area of creative and enlightened collaboration with an entire world society?

V. The challenge

To all of us who are committed to improving the conditions of children in the world I would say this is our moment. When I began speaking to you today I noted that historical moments of societal change such as we are now experiencing may occur only twice or thrice in a century. An opportunity for major breakthrough in our area of interest - children - which is being presented to us with the Summit surely occurs only once in a lifetime. This one arrives at such a hopeful moment for the children of the world - whole nations have rallied and wars have paused for the immunization of children; the Convention has been adopted and is moving toward ratification and implementation, including new attention to children in especially difficult circumstances; a new urgency is felt for quality education for all. It is the optimum moment for societies to shift their priorities in favor of children, and the future. We may truly be on the brink of becoming a civilization that gives first call on its resources to children. We are at the threshold, but we have not yet crossed into the new world. It is we, we of this generation who have declared ourselves committed to children's issues - declared ourselves by our affiliation with the world's organization for children - we who hold the key to the door that stands beyond that threshold. It is as if the lock of that door were secured by secret combination, and each of us held one part of the formula. The crucial steps through that door can only be taken with the full leadership of all of us gathered here - each in his or her respective domain of responsibility. We are faced in this moment with the challenge and the responsibility of unprecedented opportunities on behalf of children. Can we make the breakthrough? For the children - and the future - of our world, working together, I think we can.