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DRAFT for an Opening Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
High-Level Meeting on Accelerating the Implementation
of the UNICEF Policy on Girls and Women in the 1990s

New York
12-13 November 1990



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HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON ACCELERATING THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE UNICEF POLICY ON GIRLS AND WOMEN IN THE 1990s

New York, 12-13 November 1990

DRAFT FOR AN OPENING STATEMENT

BY

MR. JAMES P. GRANT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am happy to welcome all of you here today. I am particularly pleased that the Regional Directors accepted to come a little ahead of their own scheduled meeting to participate in this important consultation. This is a busy time for all of us, but it is also a time to prepare ourselves to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities opening up in this decade for children and women.

Women are UNICEF's second mandate. Any plans we make now to support governments to implement their commitments in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action must clearly reflect our own commitment to girls and women. The Declaration and Plan of Action have placed a special focus on equal opportunities for the development of girls and the role of women.

This meeting is part of a process of in-house consultations at different levels to find ways to accelerate the implementation of UNICEF's mandate on women and identify new opportunities in the 1990s.

As Regional Directors, Representatives, Directors of Divisions and Chiefs of Sections, you all know our achievements so far in improving the

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status and well-being of women in different regions and countries. For example: empowering women with information and knowledge to improve their role as healthcare givers for their families and communities; literacy and income-generation; reducing women's workload through appropriate technology and water supply; training women in handpump maintenance; integrated area-based programmes that provide health, nutrition, education, credit and other facilities for poor women. Our advocacy has helped to sensitize officials in several countries to adopt laws in favour of women and to incorporate the women's dimension in national development plans.

In a new initiative, UNICEF advocacy for the girl child and the Executive Board's endorsement in April this year of this priority focus have contributed to putting the girl child on the global agenda. As you will recall, the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action have urged that "efforts for the enhancement of women's status and their role in development must begin with the girl child". They have also called upon governments and their development partners, like UNICEF, to ensure that girls have equal opportunities to benefit from programmes of health, nutrition, education and other basic services so that they can grow to their full potential.

Of course, there are constraints and our achievements could have been much better than they are now. At present, about 30 per cent of UNICEF country programmes have incorporated the women's dimension and responded significantly to the needs of women along the lines of the 1987 strategy. Another 30 per cent are giving a partial response, while the remaining 40 per cent are focussing on women's specific projects, which are often quite marginal and ineffective.

The challenge before us is to ensure that, in the shortest possible time - and I will suggest not later than 1995 - all our programmes fully incorporate the women's dimension and address the issue of gender disparity reduction.

In the context of the development goals for children in the 1990s, the Jomtien Declaration and the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action, we would have to identify certain priorities for urgent action to make our support to girls and women more visible and sustainable. It seems to me our priorities must include:

1. Education of girls and women;
2. The girl child's status and development;
3. Women's health, including maternal mortality reduction, safe motherhood and the impact of AIDS;
4. Women's economic opportunities;
5. Women's participation and decision-making at community, local and national levels; and
6. Participation of men in the promotion of the well-being and development of children and women.

Our advocacy, social mobilization and information activities should be geared to support such priorities.

We must consider the commitments that would be necessary to achieve the full implementation of our policies on girls and women. These would primarily be commitments in human and financial resources. Our budgetary allocation to women-related activities will have to increase to meet the new goals and challenges of the 1990s. Since we know that investments in the development of girls and women, especially in education, can have huge multiplier effects on Child Survival, Protection and Development and on the quality of life of hundreds of thousands of families and communities in the countries of UNICEF co-operation, we must make these commitments.

The Executive Board requested a plan of action in 1988 for the implementation of the UNICEF policy and strategy on women. The Plan should provide UNICEF with a framework to put our objectives into concrete action and measure our achievements in assisting countries to improve the status and development of girls and women.

An outline for the draft plan for the period 1991 to 2000 will be discussed during this meeting. I welcome this initiative. I look forward to the final document that will result from close consultations in the coming months in all offices and sections and between the field and headquarters.

I thank you all for coming and good luck.