

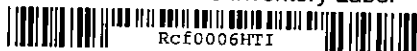
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Introduction by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to Pour Les Enfants Du Monde
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Introduction by James P. Grant, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, to *Pour Les Enfants Du Monde*, published by the French National Committee for UNICEF

Toward a Worldwide Movement for Children

Early in the next century, the children who were the subject of the 1990 World Summit for Children and who survive the last decade of the 20th century will begin to reach adulthood. They will be the first generation in history to be in a position to measure their condition against universal standards and goals guiding humanity's conduct toward the young, embodied in the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and in the *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* approved at the Summit. This alone -- quite separate from issues of compliance -- is a precious inheritance to succeeding generations.

The World Summit for Children, held at UN Headquarters in New York, 29-30 September 1990, surely stands as an historic turning-point for children everywhere -- a pivotal moment in time when global political will reached

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critical mass and efforts to improve the lives of the young began to be elevated to the highest rank of human priorities. It is naturally too soon to say whether this will be the ultimate judgment of history, but there is no question that the opportunity for ensuring such an outcome now exists for the first time.

71 Heads of State or Government attended -- more than any other such gathering in history. It was the first Summit of North, South, East and West, and the first great meeting of the post-Cold War era. The leaders were joined by senior representatives -- two thirds of them government ministers -- from 88 other countries. It was the closest thing to a global summit the world has ever seen. The fact that so many top leaders attended -- amidst the tensions provoked by the Gulf crisis, then so recent -- testifies to the magnetic power of efforts to ensure the well-being of children.

The event probably would have been judged a success by many on the basis of attendance alone, and the public attention that secured. Too, many observers accustomed to routine international conferences would have applauded consensus adoption of a final statement or declaration filled with generalities and pious adherence to the cause of children. But the World Summit for Children was unlike anything that came before it, inasmuch as the world leaders -- after thoroughly discussing the broad range of problems facing children -- personally put their signatures to a detailed, comprehensive, measurable and accountable, action-oriented agenda for children in the 1990s.

By signing the *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* and the related *Plan of Action*, the leaders committed themselves and their governments to work to attain the following major goals, among others, by the year 2000:

- * cut under-five child mortality rates by one-third;
- * reduce maternal mortality rates by 50 per cent;
- * halve severe and moderate malnutrition among children under age five;
- * ensure universal access to safe drinking water;
- * guarantee access for all to basic education and completion of primary schooling by at least 80 per cent of primary school age children, and reduce by at least half the current adult illiteracy rate, placing emphasis on female literacy.

It is estimated that implementation of such a strategy can save the lives of some 50 million children by the year 2000 and improve the quality of life of millions more.

If the promises of the Summit are kept, if the rhetorical consensus achieved there is translated into sufficient resources for development and effective action for children, those young adults of the future will look back upon the event and say it was there that a world began to take shape in which children are nurtured and cared for as a matter of course, a matter of highest priority. They will say it was there that it was finally recognized that caring for children today is not only a moral, humanitarian imperative, but also a practical, high-yield investment in the future of society.

If, however, the record of the 1990s is more "business as usual", and if the obscenity of 40,000 children dying each day, largely of preventable causes, continues, then those future adults who survive will surely say a betrayal of tragic proportions has been perpetrated against them. Disillusioned and embittered, they will not look kindly on explanations as to why so many millions "could not have been saved" or why the lives of millions more "could not have been protected and improved" in the intervening decade. They will not be satisfied with rationalizations about wars, recessions, depressions, foreign debts or gaps between rich and poor being the "cause" of their misfortune.

They will simply remind us that, in 1989 and 1990, civilization was supposed to have discarded such justifications for neglect and abuse; and that, in the Convention and Summit documents, a higher standard and a new ethic were proclaimed, according to which the essential needs of children were supposed

to be given "first call" in the allocation of resources, in bad times as well as in good times, in war as well as in peace. They will remind us, too, that the tools and techniques, the knowledge and basic resources for preventing disease and malnutrition, for enabling children to grow to their full potential, were available the whole time, at an essentially low cost, but simply were not tapped sufficiently or made available to all.

This dark scenario must not be allowed to come to pass. I believe French Prime Minister Michel Rocard spoke for all his colleagues when he solemnly stated at the Summit: "*When a child weeps, when a child dies, all mankind loses some of its dignity and hope. Often, preventing it simply depends on us. We undertake this commitment. Everything will reside in its implementation.*"

Today we are seeing governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations gearing up for the hard work of a decade, co-operating as never before all along the chain of responsibility toward the child that ends in the community and the family.

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which entered into force as international law in record time, on the eve of the Summit, is being signed and ratified at an unprecedented pace. France, which just over two hundred years ago gave the world the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, was among the first countries ratifying the Convention and is playing a

leading role in seeing to its full implementation. France is also at the forefront of efforts to develop new and improved vaccines -- efforts which have met with extraordinary success in recent years, immunizing more than three-quarters of the poor world's children against the child-killing and -crippling diseases and saving two and a half million lives a year.

Plans for implementing the full array of Summit goals are being designed and put in place; national and international mechanisms for monitoring progress are being established; resources are gradually being mobilized; new forms of co-operation between governments and non-governmental agencies are being explored -- to mention only some of the initiatives and actions underway at present.

If, as the Summit Declaration states, "the well-being of children requires political action at the highest level," it also requires the mobilization of all sectors of society -- families, communities, local governments, NGOs, social, cultural, religious, business and other institutions, including the mass media. In fact, *nothing short of a global movement similar to that of the movements against slavery, colonialism, or women's inequality will be required to meet the challenge posed by the World Summit for Children.* To succeed, a movement for children will need to ally itself with, and give a special dimension to, the movements for peace, environmental protection, population and other causes which are likely to dominate the world of the 1990s. Such a movement, which was glimpsed in the grassroots support actions that took place on the eve of the Summit, must address the situation of

children in developed and developing nations alike, stressing the common interest of all humanity in enabling the children of today to enter the world of tomorrow as healthy, productive citizens.

This volume is at once a reflection of, and a stimulus to, the development of such a worldwide children's movement. UNICEF is grateful to its authors and, as always, to the French National Committee for UNICEF, for their outstanding contributions to making childhood "*a forward, upward movement,*" as Simone de Beauvoir once so eloquently evoked.