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Address by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to a  
Special Session of the Bolivian Congress

La Paz, Bolivia  
13 August 1991



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Address by Mr. James P. Grant

Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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La Paz - 13 August 1991

Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President of the Senate, and you, Mr. President of the House of Deputies, on your election this past week. As leaders of these great legislative bodies of Bolivia, you have our best wishes for success in your work.

From the point of view of the children of Bolivia, that success would mean continued success. In early 1990, this legislature assumed a position of leadership among the parliaments of Latin America and the world when it ratified, unanimously, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. When the constitutional President of the Republic, His Excellency, Mr. Jaime Paz Zamora, signed the legislation in May of last year, Bolivia became the eighth country in the world to ratify the Convention. Now, just a little over one year later, there are ninety-four nations which have ratified this most important instrument of international law. You, ladies and gentlemen of the Congress of Bolivia, were among the pioneers. The challenge now, of course, is for countries which have ratified the Convention to ensure that their laws and legal codes -- and, most importantly, their actual practice -- are in line with the Convention's precepts.

The year 1990 was indeed an historic year for children...probably as important a year in history, from the child's point of view, as there has ever been.

- \* In 1990, of course, the world saw the end of the Cold War, with not only its danger of nuclear destruction of the world, but also its massive and wasteful arms race. Democracy is on rapid advance in every continent.
- \* In 1990, the world saw the Convention of the Rights of the Child assume the force of international law -- in record time, I might add, for any human rights treaty.

- \* In 1990, the largest gathering of the leaders of the world came together at United Nations Headquarters. 159 countries representing 99 per cent of the world's population sent high level envoys -- 71 of them were heads of state or government, for the first time from East and West, North and South. And what was the topic of discussion of this first-ever global summit? Children...children and their future.
- \* Finally, in 1990, the world saw the achievement of the pledge made in 1985, the 40th anniversary of the United Nations, of universal child immunization (UCI) of 80 per cent of the children under age one by 1990. This feat, made possible by the largest peacetime mobilization on a global scale in history, is now saving 3 million children lives a year, and is proof that promises made for children can be converted into reality.

The heads of state and government who were present at the World Summit for Children on 30 September 1990 signed a World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, and a Plan of Action for implementing the declaration in the 1990s. Since the time of the World Summit, 47 other heads of state or government, including the Constitutional President of the Republic of Bolivia, have signed the Declaration and Plan of Action. No other document in the world bears the signatures of so many world leaders and their solemn commitment for specific action. This unprecedented demonstration of political will presents us all with both a promise and a challenge.

- \* The promise, in its simplest and most general terms, is that the children of the world should receive priority, "los niños primero", or "first call" on our resources. Children should receive what they require for the fulfillment of their basic rights of survival, development, and protection. In essence, it is a promise to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. President Jaime Paz Zamora reaffirmed that promise when he signed the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action on December 19, 1990.
- \* The challenge of fulfilling that promise is a formidable one, although the strategies and goals endorsed at the World Summit are eminently "do-able". A revolution in the way society deals with children can be made...by putting them first. The World Summit for Children calls for each country to develop a ten-year programme, before the end of 1991, to move from the promise to action and results. And the results that are needed are enormous.

This is particularly true of countries like Bolivia whose development indicators and vital statistics relating to children indicate that you are among those having the farthest to go -- the most work ahead of you -- in order to reach the goals established by the international community.

The World Summit Plan of Action sets forth seven principal goals -- and 20 sub-goals such as the eradication of polio -- to be reached by each country by the year 2000. The principal goals are as follows:

- 1) By the year 2000, reduce infant mortality in countries such as Bolivia to 50 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, from its present level of approximately 100, and to reduce the under-5 mortality rate to 70, from the present level of between 150-175. This would cut in half the more than 30,000 child deaths now occurring annually in Bolivia.
- 2) By the year 2000, reduce the rate of maternal mortality by half. In Bolivia, this means reducing maternal death from a rate of 480 per 100,000 live births to 240, which is still terribly high. Currently more than 1,000 mothers are dying each year in child birth.
- 3) By the year 2000, reduce by half the rates of severe and moderate malnutrition, now suffered by more than 12 per cent of Bolivia's children under the age of five.
- 4) By the year 2000, provide universal access to safe drinking water and sanitary means of excreta disposal. In the case of Bolivia, where just 44 per cent of the population have access to clean water, I am heartened by the presidential programme of "water for all". There is an enormous amount of work to be done on this score and the task is now all the more pressing because of the cholera epidemic affecting the continent.
- 5) By the year 2000, universal access to basic education and completion of primary school by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children. This is a goal which has, I am pleased to note, been nearly met for the urban areas of Bolivia. The rural situation is, as you all know, much less fortunate. There are, in Bolivia, some 470,000 children of primary school age who are deprived of schooling. Eighty-eight per cent of these children live in rural areas, and the majority are girls.
- 6) Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to half of its 1990 level, with special emphasis on female literacy. At present, 30 per cent of all Bolivian adults are unable to read and write. Forty-three per cent of Bolivian women are illiterate.
- 7) Strengthen protection of children in especially difficult circumstances. This would include the 280,000 Bolivian children between the ages of five and 18 who have to work to support themselves or their families, and the 8,000 Bolivian children who are institutionalized.

These are very ambitious goals for Bolivia, and reaching them will require your active participation and leadership.

During the days I have spent in Bolivia, I have had the privilege of visiting El Alto and your legendary Lake Titicaca, then traveling to southern Cochabamba and northern Potosi, including Acacio, Mizque and Toro Toro. I have had the honor of meeting with many of your country's leaders:

- with the President and his Cabinet;
- with leaders of the Catholic Church, the labour unions, the media and the business community;
- and this morning with the leaders of the nation's political parties.

I have asked each of them for their active participation and commitment to reach these goals as well.

Of course, Bolivia is not starting from "zero". Many important initiatives have already been taken by the government as well as other sectors. I have already mentioned your early ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am also aware of the work that is underway on the National Code on Children and Youth, and I take this opportunity to ask you to give revision of that critically important law your urgent attention. At the same time, other laws affecting the well-being of children -- including those that would facilitate breast-feeding and curtail the promotion and marketing of breast-milk substitutes -- also deserve priority action.

In this connection, permit me to share with you news of a global initiative just getting under way, called the "Baby Friendly Hospital" campaign for which Bolivia could provide world leadership.

The World Health Organization and UNICEF have joined together to promote the certification of hospitals that take into consideration the latest research of the birth process, showing the importance of mother-child interaction from the very beginning, and especially the remarkable benefits of mother's milk. Last year, for example, more than one million children in the world would not have died had they been effectively breast-fed for the first several months of life.

From birth, the child should remain with its mother, starting breast-feeding immediately -- with no other fluids given to the baby -- no sugar water or bottle milk. Bolivia has a grand tradition of breast-feeding -- even among the educated classes women have, to a large degree, not taken on the mistaken practice of bottle feeding. The World Health Organization and UNICEF have asked the baby formula companies to stop all free distribution of baby milk in hospitals everywhere in the world over the next 18 months, in an effort to support all mothers in breast-feeding. Bolivia has been proposed as a pilot country, where we hope to assure that every hospital in the country will fully promote breast-feeding by the end of 1991 -- only 5 months from now -- and show the world that Baby Friendly Hospitals are an optimal environment for both mothers and their new born.

Shortly after assuming the presidency, President Paz Zamora personally launched the National Plan for Child Survival and Development and Maternal Health with specific goals to be achieved by 1993. I believe that this plan should serve as the cornerstone for the nation's ten-year programme for child survival, protection and development which, in accordance with the terms of the Declaration of the World Summit for Children, is to be completed by the end of this year.

I was especially pleased to learn of the Defense Ministry's plan to train all military conscripts in the basic knowledge that they, as future fathers, will need to help their children -- the next generation -- to survive and develop. Soldiers who are taught to nurture their children...this is an original Bolivian contribution to the "new thinking" of the post-Cold War world! It is an excellent example of how all sectors of society can -- and must -- be enlisted in the effort to "keep the promise" of the World Summit for Children.

I stated earlier that what is required is a revolution in the way that society deals with children. Tonight I ask you, as members of the Senate and the House of Deputies of the Republic of Bolivia, to continue in the leadership of that revolution. In your deliberations in the coming months and years, I ask you to keep the Bolivian child in the front of your minds, to keep the children high on your agenda.

Before the end of 1991, Bolivia will need to complete a national plan of action for achieving the Summit goals. It will also need considerable financial resources if the ambitious goals of the World Summit are to be reached, and while UNICEF and others will work hard to mobilize external support for your plans, the fact of the matter is that most of those resources will have to come from within, through increased allocations for priority programmes and reallocation of existing resources.

We know, of course, that finding new resources in times of austerity is very difficult and taking funds from one area in order to devote them to another is often quite painful -- and this is where leaders with courage and vision like yourselves must play a central role, mediating in the arena of public opinion the shift in priorities necessary for human development. It is a process that will benefit society as a whole in the medium- and long-term.

Your efforts internally will have to be matched by increased assistance from the international community in the form of well-targeted aid and loans, incentives to farmers to abandon the cultivation of coca leaves, improved terms of trade for your exports and debt relief -- and UNICEF is prepared to advocate for stepped-up international co-operation with Bolivia. I trust that your government's National Programme of Action for implementing the year 2000 children's goals will outline how donors can best support what you are doing yourselves.

You can have a decisive impact, not only through approval of legislation and programmes benefitting children, but as mobilizers of grassroots constituencies whose participation will, in the final analysis, determine the success or failure of government plans.

There is much that can be done for Bolivian children that does not require much, if any, in the way of additional financial resources. Each member of the Bolivian Congress can do much in providing grass roots leadership in your own political district. One example is to ensure that all hospitals in your district promote breast-feeding. Most hospitals in Latin America do not yet do so. Promoting breast-feeding in all hospitals will save the hospitals and

families money, and save Bolivia from spending scarce foreign exchange to import formula.

Another is to promote use of ORT in your district against diarrhoea -- the single biggest killer of Bolivian children. The lives of some 10,000 Bolivian children would be saved each year if only each family would practice oral rehydration therapy at home -- using a life-saving ORS sachet costing less than one Boliviano. But only one family in three uses this life-saving formula now, which is also the miracle remedy for fighting cholera. What is the extent of knowledge and use in your district?

Another example is to promote elimination of iodine deficiency in your district. Twenty per cent still suffer from iodine deficiency despite Bolivia's remarkable progress in combatting goiter in recent years. Wherever I went in rural markets I could find iodized salt -- remarkable. Yet while so many need it, most don't realize that its regular consumption can spare them from the tiring effects of deficiency and assure normal mental development in their children. Couldn't you help assure that all families in your area use iodized salt?

Finally, you also could play a key role in assuring universal immunization in Bolivia. Half the children in Bolivia are not yet fully immunized, even though I saw in Acacio in Northern Potosi that it is possible to reach even the most remote mountain hamlets. In each of your constituencies you can ask the health authorities to report each month on the progress of immunization of babies under one year of age -- the most vulnerable and important group. Your interest, and encouragement to your own people to immunize their children, will surely mobilize your home area to use this life-saving service for children.

I have appended to my printed speech the detailed goals for the year 2000, and the present situation in Bolivia. Each of you may wish to meet with appropriate authorities in your home district -- health, education, social services -- to see where your people stand in relation to the rest of the nation. You can stimulate interest to formulate your own local plan to reach these goals in your own constituency.

For each of these goals you legislators could stimulate life saving action in your home communities of virtually no additional budgetary cost to the Government.

There are sceptics who say a country whose circumstances are as difficult as yours simply cannot meet the World Summit targets, but we at UNICEF are certain that Bolivia, a country which -- against all odds -- was able to establish a stable democracy where political instability and violence had long prevailed...a country which was able to bring one of the highest inflation rates ever recorded under control...we are confident you can do it! It is true that the challenge facing you is more daunting than that confronting some of your neighbours. But the commitment shown by Bolivia's government and the increasingly dynamic activity on the part of non-governmental organizations here tell us that the challenge can be met.

Democracy cannot persist amidst social inequity. The economy cannot thrive without a healthy, educated work force. The survival and development of your children is vital not only for human love and caring but also for national values, stability and development.

And it is important to remember that progress made here — where it may be difficult — will turn Bolivia into an example for others in similar straits and help attract the increased levels of international assistance the country needs.

In closing, permit me to recall the words of Bolivian philosopher and statesman Franz Tamayo, who was also President of this Congress: "In life, the first thing is will; ability comes second. Everything else follows of its own accord. This will is the source of all wisdom, and of all reality". What is so encouraging is that, during this past week in Bolivia, I have seen both will and ability to ensure a better life for children!



## GOALS FOR CHILDREN AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1990S

(The following is the list of goals endorsed by the World Summit for Children, after deleting certain goals that are repeated.)

### I. Reduction of Mortality

1. Between 1990 and the year 2000, reduction of infant and under-5 child mortality rate by one-third or to 50 and 70 per 1000 live births respectively, whichever is less.
2. Between 1990 and the year 2000, reduction of maternal mortality rate by half.

### II. Women's Health and Education

3. Special attention to the health and nutrition of the female child, and pregnant and lactating women.
4. Access by all couples to information and services to prevent pregnancies which are too early, too closely spaced, too late or too many.
5. Access by all pregnant women to prenatal care, trained attendants during child birth and referral facilities for high risk pregnancies and obstetric emergencies.

### III. Nutrition

6. Between 1990 and the year 2000, reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among under-5 children by half.
7. Reduction of the rate of low birth weight (2.5 kg or less) to less than 10%.
8. Reduction of iron deficiency anaemia in women by one-third of 1990 levels.
9. Virtual elimination of iodine deficiency disorders.
10. Virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency and its consequences, including blindness.
11. Empowerment of all women to exclusively breast-feed their child for four to six months and to continue breast-feeding with complementary food well into the second year.
12. Growth promotion and its regular monitoring to be institutionalised in all countries by the end of the 1990s.
13. Dissemination of knowledge and supporting services to increase food production to ensure household food security.

### IV. Child Health

14. Global eradication of poliomyelitis by the year 2000.
15. Elimination of neonatal tetanus by 1995.
16. Reduction by 95 per cent in measles deaths and reduction by 90 per cent of measles cases compared to pre-immunisation levels by 1995, as a major step to the global eradication of measles in the longer run.
17. Maintenance of a high level of immunisation coverage (at least 90% of children under one year of age by the year 2000) against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, measles, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis and against tetanus for women of child bearing age.
18. Reduction by 50 per cent in the deaths due to diarrhoea in children under the age of five years; and 25 per cent reduction in the diarrhoea incidence rate.
19. Reduction by one-third in the deaths due to acute respiratory infections in children under five years.

### V. Water and Sanitation

20. Universal access to safe drinking water.
21. Universal access to sanitary means of excreta disposal.
22. Elimination of guinea-worm disease (dracunculiasis) by the year 2000.

### VI. Basic Education

23. Expansion of early childhood development activities including appropriate low-cost family and community based interventions.
24. Universal access to basic education, and achievement of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school age children through formal schooling or non-formal education of comparable learning standard, with emphasis on reducing the current disparities between boys and girls.
25. 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.
26. Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living, made available through all educational channels, including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication, and social action, with effectiveness measured in terms of behavioural change.

### VII. Children in Difficult Circumstances

27. Provide improved protection of children in especially difficult circumstances and tackle the root causes leading to such situations.