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Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Ceremony to Certify Achievement of 1990 Universal Child Immunization
Target

United Nations Trusteeship Council Chamber
New York
8 October 1991



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Ceremony to Certify Achievement of 1990 Universal Child Immunization Target

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The images you have just seen tell the story — start to tell the story — of the Expanded Programme on Immunization, humankind's historic effort to save succeeding generations from the scourge of preventable disease. Quietly — for such undertakings rarely make headlines — a world war worth fighting has been waged and, for once, children have emerged victorious. This "shooting war" using vaccines instead of bullets has claimed no human victims, wrought no destruction and produced not a single human loser. Smallpox was the first enemy to capitulate; and if we persevere, polio should surrender in this decade, and measles in the next. If we are intelligent strategists, we will not let up an instant, we will push even harder now that the adversary is on the run — and we must implacably search out those who have been unreached, for if unprotected pockets are allowed to persist, the enemy will rally its forces for a comeback.

Mr. Secretary-General, you gave this effort a decisive boost when, on June 10, 1985, you invited each of the world's leaders to enlist in this campaign for universal child immunization. You have now heard Director-General Dr. Nakajima say it, and I, too, now do so certify: the goal first established by the World Health Assembly in 1977 and which we collectively embraced, here in this house of "We the peoples", on October 25, 1985, has been reached. Against all odds — when the cold war still cast a shadow over global affairs and much of the developing world was submerged in economic crisis — against all odds, almost as advance notice of the new order that would soon appear, we did it! Unparalleled co-operation was mounted, resources were found, energies were mobilized and...80 per cent of the world's children were immunized.

It would be impossible for me to name here today all the generals — men as well as women — of immunization, all the heroes of mobilization, all the governments, international agencies, NGOs, and rank and file activists who

made this achievement possible. Looking out over this audience, I can see so many faces of those whose deep involvement was critical: the Secretary-General, whose leadership I mentioned earlier and who is also contributing so much to bring the peace throughout the world that children so desperately need; Dr. Nakajima who, following in the footsteps of his visionary predecessor Dr. Mahler and his own earlier leadership in the Western Pacific region, has led the "good fight"; President Carter, who has personally contributed so much and who has hosted the Task Force for Child Survival at the Carter Center in Atlanta as well as helping in so many parts of the world to bring the peace and democracy children need; veteran of many campaigns Bill Foege ~~of the Task Force for Child Survival and Development~~; Mera Seth, Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Women and Child Development, the second most populous country which has also seen a dramatic expansion of immunization over the last four years; Dr. Chen Min Zheng, Minister of Public Health of China, that nation which has surpassed an even higher goal than that set for the rest of the world; Rajendra Saboo, President of Rotary International, that NGO with the strength of a government and the tenderness of a parent; Dr. Ishan Dogramaci, the innovating President of the International Pediatric Association who helped Turkey innovate for the world; and in spirit in this hall the late Nils Thedin of Sweden, who first had the audacity to suggest that children should be made a zone of peace and even wars should stop to allow children to be immunized; and Ambassador Tom Pickering, who helped translate this concept into action, and so many others time won't permit me to name.

I said earlier that there have been no losers and it is true: Even where countries failed to achieve the 1990 goal, enormous progress has been made. One can't help but admire a country like Bangladesh that has gone from 2 per cent coverage in 1986 to over 70 per cent today, and which is expected to reach the 80 per cent target by year's end. Or Mexico, which may have fallen slightly short last year, but which is now going at it with a vengeance, with Mexico City already reaching the goal the world as a whole hopes to reach by the year 2000. Or Nigeria, which came in just shy of the target, but whose levels of immunization for one and two year olds are comparable or better than those for the United States and Canada.

Just over one year ago, the World Summit for Children set new and more ambitious goals -- from nutrition to maternal health to education to water and sanitation -- goals we are now more confident about pursuing thanks to the success of the immunization effort. The essential message of that first post-cold war gathering of world leaders -- and of the events that have transformed our world over the past few years -- is that what finally matters is the individual, the well-being, freedom and contribution of each and every individual, starting with each and every individual child. Only on the threshold of the 21st century, the third millenium, could humankind dare to focus on the individual amidst the multitude. By immunizing more than 100 million individual children this year -- by immunizing the more than one billion children who will be born over the decade -- we are helping to give each individual a better chance...and the world a healthier future.