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Message of Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
for  
Rajiv Gandhi: A Memorial Volume

December 1991

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

for

RAJIV GANDHI: A MEMORIAL VOLUME  
December 1991

Rajiv Gandhi was a special friend and champion of the the children of India, the children of Asia, and the children of the world. We in UNICEF felt a great sense of loss at his untimely passing.

He understood instinctively that the future development and stability of India or any nation began with healthy children. He made child survival and health a central tenet of the overall development effort, with a particular focus on the prevention of disease. He joined other Indian leaders in launching the effort to immunize India's children against preventable diseases as the "Living Memorial" to his mother, Indira Gandhi, and he lived to see that enormous goal achieved by its 1990 target date. It is truly a "living" memorial to Mrs. Gandhi and to her son, for immunization is now saving the lives of more than 1,000 Indian children every day.

Rajiv Gandhi presided over the 1986 Bangalore Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which was the first summit-level meeting to direct substantial attention to the situation of children. SAARC leadership in this field led to similar concern in many areas of the world, elevating the needs of children higher on national, regional and international political agendas, and ultimately engendering the world's first World Summit for Children.

Those who were privileged to work with him will always remember Rajiv Gandhi as a thoughtful, visionary and determined champion for children. There may be no better way to remember him than with his own words, spoken at the dedication of UNICEF's new home in 1987:

"A child comes to the world with eyes black, brown or blue, which can see the world's colours and peer at the planets and the stars. It comes with feet which can ride the surf or scale Mount Everest. It comes with hands that can grow grain, build houses, draw and paint. The same hands can stab and throttle and construct the nuclear bomb. The same feet can trample upon blood, the same eyes can witness man turning into beast. It is for us, parents, to see that that child grows up in a world of love and not a world of hate.

"My mother, who was so involved in national and international children's organizations, was fond of a moving line of the poet Rabindranath Tagore who said that each child that is born is a reminder that God has not lost hope in man. Are we doing enough to justify that hope?...

"It is not only in poor countries that children are deprived - in rich countries too they suffer from lacks. Lack of love, lack of care, lack of company. They have toys with no joy, they are surrounded by plenty but miss the sense of belonging.

"Many of the newly free developing countries have taken up special programmes for child care and child development. We stress smaller families, immunization, schooling, nutrition. We want every child to feel wanted, to feel valued. A child must be taught to love its family, his country, but it must also be taught to love the whole world and look upon it as one family...."