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Opening Statement by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
United Nations Agencies Joint Press Conference

Tegucigalpa, Honduras  
13 December 1991



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Yesterday I was privileged to witness the firm commitment of Central America's leaders to undertake concrete actions for the survival, development and protection of its children. They are the region's future.

Central America's leaders have long been aware of the need for decisive actions and have been at the forefront of innovative solutions to seemingly monumental problems. Let me cite one example, the area's attainment of Universal Childhood Immunization despite poverty, lack of infrastructures, and in some cases war. El Salvador's solution was the creation of "Days of Tranquillity" which inspired similar actions in other war-torn nations of the world. All seven countries collaborated for the first time -- as shown by this 1986 poster of children working to unite the Central American countries.

Central America has demonstrated that with vision, political will and leadership, the tragic and preventable death toll of children can be greatly reduced.

The National Plans of Action signed yesterday symbolize that vision, that political will, that leadership. More importantly, these plans symbolize the best investment of all -- the investment in human development. Since children and youth are the key to the future, investment in their development is sound economics as well as the right thing to do. Very importantly, this is the first time ever that all the heads of state of any region have acted together for human development.

The presence of so many UN agency heads, international and regional organizations at this summit shows the strong support you can count on from the international community in favor of these plans of action. Central Americans have reason to be proud of the example they are setting for the world.

Before concluding, let me add my thanks to the role played by the media -- both print and electronic -- sensitizing the public at large, as well as the highest political levels, as to the true importance of human development, children and youth.

The mass media in Central America has consistently directed public awareness to the need to measure the success or failure of any development initiative not solely in economic terms but also with regard to the quality of life.

Your coverage leading up to the World Summit for Children helped assure public pressure on the heads of state to improve that quality of life through the National Plans of Action. Your continued coverage of these important issues will help ensure the Plans implementation.