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Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Inauguration of the New UNICEF Premises in Copenhagen

Copenhagen, Denmark
10 March 1992

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Thirty years ago, the Government of Denmark offered UNICEF the possibility of using warehousing in the Freeport of Copenhagen for its embryonic warehousing and set packing activities, which had by then outgrown their cramped quarters in the third basement of the UN Secretariat in New York. As the demands placed on UNICEF to help improve the situation of children and women in the developing world grew, the requirements for supplies and equipment in support of those programmes also grew. The small warehouses scattered through the Freeport quickly became too small and, in 1978, the Government offered the use of the imposing Shed 24 warehouse which overshadows these buildings. Subsequently, the Government generously added on a production packing hall and a modern office facility, into which the bulk of our Supply Division moved -- rent-free -- in 1984.

In order to improve the efficiency of the whole supply operation, all UNICEF purchasing was consolidated in Copenhagen, in what is now the central building of this formidable complex. The latest extensions, which we are here to inaugurate, are a reflection of the continued importance of the supplies of vaccines, essential drugs, water well drilling rigs and other supply items which make up about 50 per cent of UNICEF programmes of assistance. Just as importantly, they testify to the continued support of Her Majesty the Queen as patron of the Danish National Committee for UNICEF and of the Government and people of Denmark.

This vital support is demonstrated each year by the increasing contribution of the Government to UNICEF, which in 1991 was nearly US\$30 million, to which must be added the contribution through the National Committee from the sale of greeting cards and other activities. Your Government's support is enhanced this year by these magnificent facilities which constitute the image of UNICEF in Copenhagen and Denmark. I would like to thank the Prime Minister for this very visible, very tangible continuation of the support of your Government and the people of Denmark to the work of UNICEF.

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You participated, Mr. Prime Minister, in that historic occasion which was the World Summit for Children, in New York, a year and a half ago. Your Government's recent ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child -- which you had signed while in New York -- is a further demonstration of Denmark's commitment to improving the well-being of children everywhere. The Convention -- which is now the law of the land in 110 countries -- establishes a legal and ethical framework which converts children's essential needs into rights. The World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action reflects a global consensus that meeting those needs and ensuring those rights deserves to be elevated to the first rank of social priorities.

As you know, the heads of state and government who took part in the World Summit for Children committed themselves and their governments to reaching some 27 goals for children and women by the year 2000. It is an ambitious programme but certainly a do-able one in this post-Cold War world that has begun to beat swords into ploughshares, amidst a consensus in favour of sustainable, human development.

They were given confidence to set this array of measurable, trackable, time-bound goals by the success of the global effort to reach universal child immunization (UCI), defined as 80 per cent of all one-year-olds, by the end of 1990. Denmark should feel proud of the fact that the needles, syringes, sterilizers and cold chain equipment used in the immunization campaign are shipped from this supply and distribution facility, and the vaccines themselves are ordered from Copenhagen. You are a key link in this largest global collaboration ever mounted in peacetime and the expansion and modernization of UNICEF's facilities here will help us meet the goal of reaching 90 per cent of the world's children with vaccines by the end of the decade. And I might mention, parenthetically, at this point, how concerned we are over the increasing costs of vaccines and what a concerted effort will be required to sustain and expand their flow to the growing population of infants worldwide.

We, in turn, are delighted that Danish industry has benefitted from the excellent relationship between UNICEF and Denmark. We are now purchasing over US\$26 million yearly in supplies and services from over 250 Danish companies, and the greater part of the US\$7 million we pay in salaries here goes back into the Danish economy.

I cannot allow this occasion to pass without mentioning the support provided to emergency assistance -- man-made and natural calamities. In 1991, more than 400 emergency shipments -- two per working day -- were made from here to 57 countries. I would like to express my appreciation to the warehouse workers and all Supply Division staff and management for the monumental effort involved in meeting emergency needs while supplying regular programmes.

In a development none of us would have dreamed of just a few years back, we have just begun to ship vaccines and essential drugs to the Commonwealth of Independent States -- a new frontier for the humanitarian assistance

programmes of the United Nations. In addition, UNICEF has recently been joined here in Copenhagen by the Inter-Agency Procurement Service Office of the United Nations Development Programme, in a further move toward coordination of UN system procurement.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Housing and the architects, as well as the many construction companies, who worked on this project. You have given us a structure and complex unique in the United Nations system.

I am not much of a fan of formal monuments and ceremony; I would like to think of this living building, this bee-hive of activity, as the most appropriate kind of monument to Danish commitment to international cooperation and the to world's youngest and most vulnerable.

We have come a long way together. When we inaugurated the UNIPAC centre here in 1984, average life expectancy in India was 56; only eight years later -- the blink of an historical eye, really -- Indians can expect to live to the age of 60...with each passing day, a gain of nearly an 12 hours of additional life. In the developing world as a whole, average life expectancy has increased by over one-third between 1960 and 1990 -- and is now 63 years (compared to over 75 years in the industrialized nations). Under-five mortality rates were halved over the last three decades, although every week a quarter of a million children still die of preventable causes.

Indeed, the world has changed so much in recent years that one could almost speak of a new world. I say almost, because to the one billion of our neighbours who are poor -- who live on a dollar a day or less -- not much has changed. To the families of the 14 million children who will die this year of largely preventable malnutrition and disease, talk of a new international order would ring quite hollow. For it to be meaningful, a new global order will have to use the many opportunities opened up by the end of the East-West conflict to address the North-South divide, the poverty gap within and between nations, the inter-related issues of environment, population and sustainable, human development.

The partnership that has developed over the years between UNICEF and Denmark is on the cutting edge of the changes of our times and stands as a model for international cooperation for development. I thank you from the bottom of my heart -- on behalf of the children of the world -- for your generous support and collaboration.