

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1992-0017

Speaking Points for Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Organizational Session of the Executive Board

New York
24 March 1992



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Rc.F0006HVG

Item # CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1998-02292

ExR/Code: CF/EXD/SP/1992-0017

Organizational Session of the Executive Board. Speaking P
Date Label Printed 20-Aug-2002

cover + 5pp + Øb

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1992-0017

Mr. James P. Grant

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

Speaking Points

at the

Organizational Session of the Executive Board

New York - 24 March 1992

1. For UNICEF, 1991 has been a year of intense activity: programme delivery in over 110 countries; responding, with our UN system partners, to an unusually large number of emergencies, natural and man-made; and laying the groundwork for a decade of work aimed at helping governments "keep the promise" of the World Summit for Children.
2. The momentum created by the events of 1990 continues. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has now been ratified by 114 countries and the Committee on the Rights of the Child is functioning, ready to start receiving reports from States Parties. We are generally encouraged by follow-up to the World Summit. NPAs are in various stages of preparation in some 120 countries -- 28 have been completed and issued; 18 others are in draft or outline form, 78 others are in the works. But the response -- while positive -- remains uneven: by this time, we had hoped to see more NPAs completed; we had hoped more industrialized countries would have had their NPAs ready, along with reviews of ODA in line with World Summit priorities; and too few countries have actually begun to restructure their budgets in the "first call for children" mode. But we remain optimistic that the commitments of the World Summit will be seriously pursued.
3. Events of the last year have reconfirmed our early conviction that the 1990s could be a "window of opportunity" for quantum leaps of human progress. The end of the Cold War and the democratic upsurge in much of the East and South have altered the fundamental character of international life. Possibilities for global co-operation on a scale that would have been unthinkable only five years ago can now be visualized and undertaken. Last week's referendum against apartheid in South Africa reaffirms the message of last August in what is now the Commonwealth of Independent States...the message of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall...the message of peace settlements in Cambodia, Angola, El Salvador and elsewhere: people want peace, they want democracy and development.

cover + 5pp + 8b

4. The United Nations finds itself at the centre of numerous peace processes and can increasingly turn its attention to the social and economic problems which threaten international security every bit as much as nuclear weapons did for more than four decades. Our new Secretary-General can build on the successful tenure of his predecessor, with the strong mandate for reform and innovation given him by the international community. The great challenge of the 1990s will be to beat the swords of cold and hot wars into ploughshares of economic growth and human development. If we need new "enemies" against which to mobilize, let us target poverty, underdevelopment, disease, ignorance, environmental degradation and discrimination of all kinds, with the same single-mindedness and willingness to sacrifice demonstrated during the four decades following the Second World War. Let North and South unite against these common foes -- otherwise a divide every bit as dangerous as the East-West conflict will open beneath our feet. The UN must play a central role in ensuring that this does not happen.
5. The situation facing children and women in Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, remains grim, despite the promising signs of hope engendered by the political developments there. The fact remains that Africa's debt exceeds its annual GNP, malnutrition rates have not changed for 20 years, and the numbers of children dying is increasing so fast that they are likely to overtake the numbers dying in the whole of Asia, excluding China, before the middle of this decade. Africa has to remain our highest priority. African governments themselves have realized the need to address their human development needs, and besides preparing in detail for the donor conference for Africa, called by the OAU, they have also been among the leading regions of the world in ratifying the Convention of the Rights of the Child and starting the preparation of National Programmes of Action.
6. The challenges of achieving the year 2000 goals in Africa are enormous as the rate of change required away from current trends will be the greatest the world has ever known in human development terms. In addition, in Africa, this change will be required to take place under the most adverse international economic circumstances to have occurred since the independence of most African countries. UNICEF is committing as many of our skilled staff resources as possible to assist African governments to develop National Programmes of Action, particularly to elaborate the costing and financing elements of the NPAs.
7. The arrival of peace to Angola and Ethiopia has revealed more precisely the extent of human needs after the many years of war, but the return to normalcy will not be as swift as we all would wish, and neither will it be without demands for resources for reconstruction. At the same time, civil strife has continued or expanded in Liberia, Mozambique and Somalia, creating many thousands more refugees and displaced people even as the attention of the rest of the world is

shifting to problems elsewhere. The situation in Somalia has been particularly tense, especially around Mogadishu where our staff have, in the face of tremendous odds, continued to provide supplies and support for humanitarian relief efforts. In Northern Somalia, the comparative peaceful conditions which allowed us to expand our operations to several towns, proved deceptive when a UNICEF staff member, Dr. Martinka Pumpalova, was shot and killed on January 5th. We all honour her memory.

8. As indicated by last week's referendum, prospects for peace in South Africa appear to be improving, despite recent uncertainties in the political process there. UNICEF continues to work closely with the democratic non-racial NGOs concerned with children, and recently held an internal policy seminar which benefited from the presence of several members of these NGOs as well as other members of the UN family. We remain ready to establish normal operations in South Africa as soon as conditions permit, and meanwhile we plan to respond to several requests for urgent assistance for displaced people and returnees, in coordination with UNHCR. Besides the impact of apartheid, children and women in Southern Africa now also have to face the prospects of a severe drought, perhaps the worst in the region for 30 years. While declines in food supplies and water shortages are the most immediate impact, increasing malnutrition opens the way for other, ordinarily minor diseases, to cause death. UNICEF in conjunction with regional organizations and other sister agencies will be stepping up assessments, with WFP and others, in the concerned countries to ensure that the response of the UN system covers both food and non-food requirements, including drinking water supplies, essential medicines and relief items for displaced people.
9. Preparations for the OAU Donors Conference proceed apace. The OAU has received an invitation from a member State offering to host the Conference, probably in November this year. Besides assisting governments to prepare their NPAs, UNICEF in conjunction with regional organizations and other UN agencies is also preparing several sectoral overview papers which elaborate on the possibilities and strategies for achieving the Goals for the 1990s in Africa. Interest in the OAU Conference has been expressed by a number of development agencies and donor governments, and it is hoped that a substantive dialogue on new approaches for sustainable human development in Africa can take place at the Conference.
10. The need for more resources flowing to Africa, and less resources flowing out of Africa, is key to the achievement of the 1990s Goals in Africa. Yet, despite our efforts to raise awareness in all quarters about the needs for assistance to Africa, we notice that contributions to our supplementary funding programmes in Africa are not increasing at the same rate as they are for other regions. This is particularly true for our non-emergency programmes - which offer the best chances for Africa to build sustainable development. While there have been so far no declines as such in contributions to Africa, their lack of growth in the face of such urgent and pressing

needs is worrying. Within UNICEF, we have been careful to ensure that, despite the multiple demands on management attention and time, Africa remains the region of highest priority in corporate terms. We will revert to this topic in more detail during our regular session, when the secretariat will be presenting a paper on the "Operationalisation of UNICEF's Priority to Africa".

11. As distinguished delegates will be aware, UNICEF/WHO collaborative missions to the countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States took place last month. These missions also included the participation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The reports from these missions were completed, as planned, by the middle of this month, and are now available.
12. It, of course, is not my intention to engage the Board, in this organizational session, in the substantive issues that may arise from the situation in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Commonwealth of Independent States countries. Those discussions, and any decisions that result from them, properly belong within the regular session of the Executive Board in June. It is, however, incumbent on me today to briefly outline the findings of the missions in broad terms, and to advise you on how I plan to address this matter in June.
13. On the findings of the reports, allow me to quote briefly from the executive summary of the overview.

"The situation today in the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic countries combines economic transition with growing economic and social disruption. This is undermining existing social support systems and threatening the health and welfare of women, children and vulnerable groups. A human crisis is looming. The number of people affected, and how seriously, will depend greatly on the speed and relevance of the actions taken to provide timely, well-focused support, nationally and internationally especially in the areas of health and nutrition. In addition, a strong human component must urgently be added to the adjustment policies being pursued by the Governments concerned. Monitoring of the changing human situation is needed to ensure well-informed adaptations of targeted help.

The unprecedented nature of this emerging crisis requires immediate international assistance to avoid the collapse of the health services, sustain nutritional safety nets and initiate restructuring of health and social systems during the transformation, so they can become viable in the new market economy. While the most urgently needed support will often be life-saving and to spare needless human suffering, most of the measures can be temporary, giving way to new national systems as soon as they emerge and show the capacity to meet the needs of the populations concerned. In addition, collaborative action, going beyond emergency assistance, is needed, to maintain

access to promotive preventive, and essential curative health care, while identifying steps needed to ensure the more efficient use of health and food resources and to restructure administrative and social support services. Access to modern ideas and knowledge will enable professionals to modify systems and the public at large to take measures to facilitate the transition. The temporary nature of the required support should not obscure the fact that this is a major opportunity to assure that basic humanitarian needs are met, thus supporting successful transition of the newly independent republics into democracies that are productive members of the global economy."

14. As you will understand, these reports reflect the views of the distinguished experts who were on the Missions, and have not yet been fully reviewed by the agencies concerned. I will be weighing these reports very carefully, along with other relevant elements, before deciding on any recommendations to the Executive Board in June. These would be included in a document providing my assessment of what policies and activities I believe would be appropriate for UNICEF to undertake in these countries in the short and medium-term, and in collaboration with our sister agencies. Any proposed staffing and financial implications of course would also be presented to you at that time.
15. As you will see from the agenda for the regular session agenda, item 5 (e) will cover any discussion on the subject of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Commonwealth of Independent States. As requested by Executive Board decision 1991/20, I will also report in June "on the requirements of such children as may be in especially difficult circumstances" in all countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Commonwealth of Independent States. We will also prepare a conference room paper on UNICEF activities in Romania, where a special representative established a UNICEF office in January 1991 funded by special contributions from several governments and national committees.
16. Finally, I would like to report to you on some immediate steps I am taking on an emergency basis.