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Article by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

"The Human Development Dimension of the Environmental Crisis"

for the
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"The Human Development Dimension of the Environmental Crisis"

by Mr. James P. Grant

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

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I remember reading, as a child, any number of science fiction stories about how the peoples of the earth would unite to defeat an alien invasion or avert -- at the eleventh hour, of course -- collision with some giant asteroid. Those cliff-hangers always had happy endings. The threats children are aware of today, on the threshold of the 21st century and the third millennium, do not come from outer-space -- holes in the ozone layer and global warming notwithstanding. They come from right here, from humankind itself, from the perverse disregard we have shown toward the earth and the environment which gives us life.

Fortunately, we are also the solution. Young people -- increasingly, our most dedicated environmental activists -- understand this. And they know that now that the Cold War has ended, we are in a better position than ever to work together, globally, to save the planet. Nothing short of shaping a new world order is required -- and a permanent ethical commitment to making the earth a secure and hospitable home for present and future generations.

The heads of state and government who attended the historic World Summit for Children in September 1990 recognized that any meaningful new world order must start with the children. We cannot save the environment without tackling the poverty and underdevelopment whose consequences kill 14 million children year in and year out, and which condemn one billion among us to a half-life of hunger, disease and diminished potential.

The World Summit for Children was a call to focus on human development. Our next global summit -- the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development -- also must adopt such a focus, for every environmental issue has a human development aspect. The crisis we face isn't science fiction; it is all too real, and we cannot wait till the eleventh hour to act. But together, starting with the children, we can ensure a happy ending -- or rather, a happy new beginning -- to our story.

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