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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
on the occasion of  
The Day of the African Child 1992

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The Day of the African Child is an occasion for celebration. Celebration because Africa has worked many small miracles for its children in these difficult times. Prolonged economic crisis, civil strife and natural calamities have set the continent ~~way~~ back over the past decade, and there is ample proof that children have suffered -- have suffered greatly. But it is also true that Africa has found ways to continue nurturing its young. High levels of immunization against the major childhood diseases have been achieved; oral rehydration therapy is saving many thousands of lives that would otherwise have been lost to dehydrating diarrhoea; innovations have permitted scattered but significant progress in primary health care and education even as social sector budgets have been slashed; many communities and governments have mobilized for development, with increased attention to children and women. At times it seemed as if the world had forgotten Africa and its children...but Africa has never forgotten its children.

We commemorate the Day of the African Child this year amidst intensive preparations for the International Donors' Conference on Assistance to African Children -- a most welcome initiative by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that will take place in Dakar, Senegal, in November 1992, with President Diouf as host. UNICEF, which considers Africa its most urgent priority, is working closely with the OAU to ensure the success of this crucial conference -- undoubtedly, the most important event of 1992 for children.

It is our hope that the Dakar gathering will mark the beginning of a new era of co-operation between Africa and the international donor community. A new kind of relationship is needed between North and South, one that recognizes the inescapable interdependence of the industrial and developing worlds and the urgent need to narrow the gap between rich and poor nations for the security and well-being of all. It could begin with Africa, starting in Dakar.

Although the Dakar meeting is not slated to be a pledging conference, a serious dialogue there should open the way to providing Africa with a piece -- a generous piece -- of the peace dividend resulting from the end of the Cold War. Significant resources that are becoming available due to reduced military expenditures in both donor and African nations must fuel the engines of change now starting, despite immense difficulties, in one African country after another: pluralistic democracy and market-oriented economic reform. Through increased assistance or aid restructured to better support human development...through debt relief and forgiveness...through improved commodity prices and eased access for African exports to the markets of the North...through stepped up investment and trade, the donor community can

provide critical support to Africa's move toward more democratic government, and away from inefficient state corporations, endemic corruption, and insufficient investment in human development.

The post-Cold War world began testing its new-found possibilities by coming together at the September 1990 World Summit for Children. Africa will be a crucial test of the commitments made there. The continent's efforts to meet the year 2000 goals established at the World Summit need to be supported by the international community. Well-targeted expenditures and aid in the fields of basic health and learning; nutrition; the girl child; water and sanitation, AIDS, family planning and other areas of human development must be seen as high-return investments in a better future and a better world.

Success in Africa would enable us to begin to speak, with some degree of ethical consistency, of the emergence of a meaningful new world order. As the articles in this press kit eloquently -- and sometimes painfully -- indicate, Africa's children cannot wait.