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Message from Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Closing of the 1992 Session of the UNICEF Executive Board  
"Sustained Momentum for Delivering on the Promise to Children"

New York  
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FOR INFORMATION

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New York - 26 June 1992

"Sustained Momentum for Delivering on the Promise to Children"

The gavel you have wielded so effectively over the past two weeks, Madam Chairperson, will soon sound the adjournment of this 1992 session of UNICEF's Executive Board. I am certain all of us will agree that this unusual June meeting has been most fruitful and constructive. Looking back, I believe all would agree that we've come a long way in the past few years.

In 1989 and 1990, in two regular and two special sessions, this Executive Board took two bold moves that some might have called high-risk gambles: first, at a time when United Nations action on the social front lagged far behind gains made in the field of international peace and security, the Board took a leap of faith and said the world was now ready to move on children as the cutting-edge of a much broader movement against poverty's most brutal manifestations. And you committed your governments and UNICEF to an unprecedented number of ambitious goals to radically improve children's lives; goals that were reachable -- you said -- within the relatively short span of ten years. Understandably, sceptics assumed it was just another decade dedicated to worthy but unrealizable goals.

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But in that year of the achievement of the goal of immunizing 80 per cent of the world's under one-year-olds ... in that year of the speedy entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, you took a second courageous plunge. At a time when the potential for global co-operation in the post-cold war era had not yet been tested, you did not hesitate to give your full backing to the holding of the first-ever global summit -- the World Summit for Children -- and you gave UNICEF the green light to serve as its Secretariat. The Summit was a smashing success, but here, too, the sceptics cast a jaundiced eye at what they thought might amount to little more than a photo-opportunity for politicians eager to be seen kissing children on a world stage.

A year later, at the 1991 Board session, we met to grapple with the central issue of how the promises made to children could be kept. The question remained: would the global community seriously and conscientiously follow-up on the commitments made in 1990? At the 1991 Board, you forged ahead -- as I said at the closing session -- building firm foundations beneath the great castles we had created in the sky.

Subsequent events and this year's session of the Executive Board indicate that the calculated risks of 1990 and 1991 were worth taking. Our collective act of faith is paying off. We see proof of this, first, in the series of global meetings held over the past year to spur action to meet some of the key goals of the Summit -- on areas ranging from acute respiratory infections and micronutrient deficiencies to humanitarian ceasefires and safe motherhood. And the Summit goals have been reaffirmed at virtually every regional and sub-regional gathering of heads of state and by regional groupings of countries. Second and foremost, we see proof of this in the seriousness with which country after country -- developing and industrial alike -- are drafting National Programmes of Action to implement goals adapted from the Summit Plan of Action. We see this in the progressive universalization of the Convention on the Rights of the Child -- now the law of the land in 119 nations -- and in the preparations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child which will soon begin to examine national compliance by States Parties. We see this, too, in the success of the historic United Nations Conference on Environment and Development recently held in Rio, and in the incorporation in Agenda 21, UNCED's strategic action plan, of all the key goals for children and women set at the World Summit for Children two years earlier. And we see this, of course, in the strengthening of the ongoing country programmes which are the heart and soul of what UNICEF is all about.

This Executive Board session has sent a reassuring message to the children of the world; it is, essentially, that the momentum to deliver on the promises of 1990 is being sustained. In UNICEF it is being sustained through your approval of:

- \* the Medium-term Plan for 1992-1995 and 37 country programmes (including significant levels of supplementary funds which now must be raised);

- \* landmark resolutions on Africa (where the gap between what exists and what needs to be done for children is greatest);
- \* on Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltics and the Commonwealth of Independent States (where the historic restructuring now in process needs to be done with a "human face");
- \* on follow-up to the World Summit for Children;
- \* on children, environment and development (dovetailing with the momentum generated by the Earth Summit);
- \* on strengthening national capacities,
- \* and on the proposals I made for United Nations reform (as a contribution to the important upcoming discussions in ECOSOC and the General Assembly).

I am especially pleased to see that in your resolutions on World Summit follow-up and Africa there is explicit support given to the Organization of African Unity's upcoming International Conference on Assistance to African Children, which is one of several key initiatives underway to expedite the implementation of National Programmes of Action.

Through the guidance you have given us in these and other areas, you have helped again to ensure that the World Summit for Children wasn't a one-time event, but the beginning of a process that has now taken on sustainable momentum. You have challenged your Secretariat to continue at the cutting edge of the growing movement for human development.

During the past two weeks of our deliberations, almost half a million children still died in the developing countries of largely preventable causes — an unacceptable, obscene toll and a reminder of the compelling urgency of our work. As we met here these past two weeks, our Organization continued its work in the field, helping to:

- \* provide infants with 19 million vaccinations against the six killer diseases of childhood;
- \* complete over 4,000 water systems serving some 850,000 people and 26,000 latrines for 230,000 people;
- \* train roughly 50,000 people in developing countries to strengthen national capacity in a variety of fields;
- \* establish in more than a score of additional hospitals the ten breastfeeding practices enabling them to qualify as being Baby Friendly;
- \* work with Mayors in scores of cities to extend child-focussed services and activities along the lines inspired by the important meetings of Mayors in Rome and Dakar;

\* send 220 tonnes of emergency goods to Argentina, Bulgaria, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, the former Yugoslavia and Zaire -- including such hot-spots as Mogadiscio, Sarajevo and Ngorno-Karabakh.

Distinguished delegates, I would be remiss if I failed to say a few words about the 5,513 (at last count) women and men who live and breathe this noble undertaking on behalf of the world's children on a daily basis. UNICEF's staff members working in 127 countries -- in a total of 208 offices -- often under difficult and even dangerous circumstances, deserve our whole-hearted appreciation. They are the ones in whose hands the policies you establish come to life. They are the ones working miracles with limited resources. They are the professional cadre of the Grand Alliance for Children, do-ers and catalysts of the doings of others. Dedicated to service, they know that the greatest help one can give others is to empower them to help themselves.

Year after year, this Executive Board approves policies, programmes and budgets which significantly increase the impact and scope of UNICEF's activities. This is as it should be, given the urgency and magnitude of our task. But this also means continually increasing workloads for our staff. Over the past two years, in particular, our colleagues have seen their responsibilities increase exponentially. They are conscious of the need to take full advantage of the opportunities which the 1990s offer for human progress, and so they have truly risen to the occasion. But as we applaud their dedication and willingness to always do more, we should always keep in mind the need to improve their working conditions to preserve and promote the optimal use of our most precious human resources over the long haul.

And a long haul it has been for our colleagues who retired since we last met in regular session or who are about to retire. They, and others whose names and special achievements time does not permit me to mention here today, deserve our deepest gratitude.

Among those with whom many of you have worked over the years, let me begin with Victor Soler-Sala. A national of Spain, Victor took early retirement in March, after 34 years with the organization. He joined UNICEF in 1958 as an Assistant Programme Officer in the Americas Regional Office in New York. From 1959 to 1975, he served in a series of posts of increasing responsibility at headquarters and the field. He then served, successively, as UNICEF Representative in Bogota and in Jakarta; as Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa; Director of our Geneva Office; Director of the Division of Public Affairs in New York, where his first love was giving life and meaning to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And finally, in 1991, he was appointed UNICEF Representative in Beijing, where he continued to serve until his retirement.

Harold Fleming, one of our Senior Programme Funding Officers, is retiring in a few weeks. He came to our Programme Funding Office in 1986 after many years of distinguished U.S. government service, which included participation in his country's delegation to the UNICEF Executive Board.

Dr. Samuel Ofosu-Amaah, a national of Ghana, and one of Africa's most distinguished primary health care specialists, is retiring in July. He joined UNICEF in 1984, serving as PHC Advisor and Senior Adviser for Health in the Programme Division. In 1988, he was promoted to the post of Deputy Manager of the Bamako Initiative Management Unit and will continue to serve in that capacity until his retirement.

Juan Antonio Lopez-Penela, UNICEF Representative in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, since 1990, retires in August. A Spaniard, he joined UNICEF in 1967 as Assistant Programme Officer in Lima, Peru. From 1971 to 1977 he served in India in a series of posts of increasing responsibility, when he was transferred to Geneva as Contributions Officer. In 1980, he was appointed UNICEF Representative in Kabul, where he remained for eight extremely difficult years. From 1988 until his appointment as Representative in Haiti, he was Senior Programme Officer in the Africa Section at Headquarters.

Dr. J. Peter Greaves will retire in September. A national of the United Kingdom, a distinguished nutritionist in both research and policy, he joined UNICEF in New Delhi as Senior Programme Officer in 1976. He became UNICEF Representative in Brasilia in 1980. Three years later, he was transferred to the post of Senior Programme Officer, Nutrition, in New York, where he continued to be a pioneering advocate for nutritional initiatives, from promoting breastfeeding to micronutrients.

We will also say goodbye to Maria Diamanti, UNICEF Representative in Kinshasa, Zaire, in September. A national of Greece, she joined UNICEF in 1965 as Personal Assistant to Henry Labouisse, the Executive Director. She served, successively, in Beirut, Algiers and Kathmandu. Then, in 1985, she was transferred to Bujumbura to become the first UNICEF Representative to Burundi. She has been our Representative in Zaire since October 1990.

UNICEF's Representative in Brazzaville, Congo, since 1988, Mukalay Mwilambwe, is also retiring in September. A national of Zaire (and at one time a member, I believe, of Belgium's national football team), he joined UNICEF in 1977 as Programme Co-ordinator in Cote d'Ivoire. From 1983 to 1988, he served as our Representative in Senegal.

We're saying farewell to the Directors of two of our regions this year. Teresa Albanez of the Americas and Caribbean office left us in April to take up the post of Minister of the Family, and coordinator of the whole social sector, in Venezuela. She was a staunch advocate for the region within UNICEF and an equally staunch advocate for UNICEF in the region. Mary Racelis, of the office for Eastern and Southern Africa, will retire in December. In her 13 years of service to UNICEF, she has helped shape our approach to the critical role of women in development and exercised an especially participatory style of leadership. Happily, they will be succeeded by two seasoned colleagues ready to carry on the tradition: Marta Mauras in TACRO and Cole Dodge in ESARO.

It's been said that the only true retirement is that of the heart and I am certain our friends have no plans along those lines. I trust they will continue doing much good in the world and hope that we can count on them to share the wisdom of their experience in various capacities in the coming years.

But now, sadly, I must pay tribute to our staff members and associates who died since the 1991 Board -- who also continue doing much good in the world through their enduring example.

First, Bjorn Oldaeus, whom I spoke about in my opening statement and who most or all of you knew well.

Dr. Martinka Pumpalova, a Bulgarian pediatrician working for UNICEF, was shot and killed by terrorists in January while on mission in Somalia. Her longtime service in Africa -- in particular, Ethiopia -- won her widespread recognition as a dedicated humanitarian and courageous internationalist.

Francoise Levesque of Canada had taken a leave of absence from CIDA and only recently begun, in March 1992, a two-year appointment with UNICEF as Regional Education Adviser in the Abidjan Regional Office, when she suddenly passed away on 7 June while on mission in Bamako, Mali.

The loss of Dr. Pumpalova and Ms. Levesque to UNICEF, to the development community and to Africa, will be felt deeply.

Lastly, I would like to pay special tribute to three exceptional human beings who passed away in recent months, who were not UNICEF staff members but certainly illustrative of the larger UNICEF family: First Lady Sally Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Professor Derek Jelliffe and Garth Pettitt.

Sally Mugabe was a giant in the cause of children, establishing the Child Survival and Development Foundation and giving herself over one hundred per cent to organizing countless campaigns and events to benefit the children of her country and Africa as a whole. Her leadership in drawing attention to the suffering and needs of children on the Front Line of southern Africa remains a lasting inspiration.

Dick Jelliffe, long associated with UNICEF, helped change the way the world thinks about public health in developing countries. He was an innovator in the broad field of child nutrition, but it was as an international authority and fervent advocate for breastfeeding that he became best known, and it is here that his work has especially influenced our own. The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative is itself testimony to his tireless advocacy.

And a tragic accident robbed us of another truly dedicated children's advocate, Garth Pettitt, whom we remember as an eloquent member of the U.K. delegation to this Board and, more recently, for his involvement with the UK National Committee for UNICEF. Garth played an active role in helping UNICEF to become a better organization.

We extend to President Mugabe, to Patrice Jelliffe and Garth Pettitt's family -- and to the families of all our late colleagues -- our deepest sympathy.

We are inspired not only by these friends who have been laid to rest, but by the example of two offices and four individuals whose work we want to recognize and pay tribute to here today. I am pleased to announce that the 1991 UNICEF Staff Awards for Outstanding Service go to:

\* The Bagdad Office, under the leadership of our Representative, Dr. Gianni Murzi, for their outstanding work carried out under extreme hardship and often dangerous conditions since the return of UNICEF to Iraq on 16 February 1991, prior to the end of the war. UNICEF's staff in all locations in Iraq have cooperated as a great team and worked around the clock to assist children and women in the organization's largest emergency operation in 1991.

\* The Somalia Office, under the leadership of our Representative, David Bassiouni, for their bravery and determination to reach children, women and other victimized groups affected by the turmoil in Somalia, under extremely difficult circumstances. While only staff members who volunteered to enter Mogadiscio were allowed to go, it is noteworthy that the office never lacked staff to provide the citizenry with desperately needed food, medicine and other assistance.

\* Joseph Acar, Chief of the Personnel Policy and Services Section of our Division of Personnel in New York, and a 19-year UNICEF veteran, in special recognition of his 13-year tenure in Personnel. In addition to shaping progressive personnel policies, he has been a trusted counsellor on personnel matters to management and staff alike.

\* Ole Boye, Shipping Officer and Emergency Co-ordinator in the Supply Division in Copenhagen, and Maurice Dardas, Assistant Supply Officer in Amman, in recognition of their outstanding service in support of emergency operations in 1991.

\* and lastly, Rhonwen Searle, Information Assistant in the Division of Information, New York, for her remarkable work, since 1964, keeping the UNICEF family in touch and up to date through the regular exchange of information and experience.

They are all excellent examples of the unsung heroes whose dedicated service has made a difference to UNICEF's work on behalf of children.

In the past two weeks, distinguished delegates, you have given us the mandate to sustain our programmes and advocacy over the long haul. At this Board meeting -- where we were privileged to hear the warmly supportive words of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Ogata, Ms. Bertini and Under-Secretary-General Eliasson -- it wasn't UNICEF alone that was empowered; it is clear that UNICEF's ongoing joint work with other agencies was recognized and UN system coordination as a whole was strengthened. We are particularly appreciative of Jan Eliasson's portrayal of UNICEF as a strong and committed team player



helping to strengthen the entire system's response to emergencies -- that is certainly our intention! The vote of confidence you have given to our responses to an increasing number of emergencies is another source of encouragement.

Looking ahead, our tasks are clear:

1. National Programmes of Action need to be completed in countries that have yet to complete them.

2. Where they have already been approved at the national level, they must be translated into local Programmes of Action -- and, every day, into more action!

3. The private sector, NGOs, civic groups, religious and professional associations -- the entire fabric of societies -- need to be integrally involved in the process.

4. Governments of all countries must ensure the minimal resources necessary to fulfill their National Programmes for their own children. This does not necessarily require new funding, but surely requires a better prioritization in budget allocations.

5. Aid administrations in donor countries must focus on the various ways they can do more to support developing country efforts to meet the year 2000 goals. Again, this does not necessarily require new funding, but does require a re-direction of resources to the highest priority human needs. As I mentioned in my opening statement to the Board, only 6.5 per cent of total bilateral ODA is currently going to human priorities. Raising the level to 20 per cent over the next three or four years -- as recommended in UNDP's Human Development Report -- would cover approximately two-thirds of the US\$6-7 billion additional external assistance estimated to be required to achieve the World Summit goals for the 1990s.

I cannot emphasize enough these last two points. The key test between now and the next Executive Board session will be whether a clear shift toward increasing allocations for priority human needs begins to take place. If this shift doesn't take place, then the promises of the 1990s will be hollow indeed.

All of us will need each other's help ... we all need one another ... in order to sustain the momentum we have achieved. If we can sustain it, our success will not only benefit children, but -- through the linkages of our work for children with development, population and environment -- will contribute greatly to the crisis prevention the Secretary-General told us is one of his top priorities.

In closing, I can do nothing better than to echo Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali's words to us last week: "I look forward to working with you in this most rewarding of undertakings: to secure a better tomorrow for children, who are the future."