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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
High-Level Segment of  
The Economic and Social Council

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HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF  
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

STATEMENT BY  
MR. JAMES P. GRANT  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
UNICEF

(8 July 1992)

Mr. President,

In his opening address, the Secretary-General spoke of the times in which we live as having both challenge and opportunity. His report for this segment articulates well both parts of this description. From UNICEF's particular vantage-point, we, too, see both challenges and opportunities in the current situation. A single statistic captures our essential challenge: in the course of this day, nearly **40,000 children under five years of age will die**. This week more than a quarter of a million children will die. Nothing can justify such an obscene toll in a world that knows how to prevent -- at very low cost -- most of the mass deaths of children from disease and malnutrition. But another statistic illuminates our great opportunity: if we reach the "do-able" goals set at the World Summit for Children, we can save the lives of some 50 million children by decade's end and improve the lives of millions more. In achieving the Summit goals, we will also help address population concerns, diminish the apartheid of gender, advance sustainable development and enhance the prospects for democracy. In the era we have embarked upon, there can be no legitimate rationale for failing to achieve these goals.

The United Nations system can and must play a key role in helping to address these challenges. The Secretary-General proposed a number of the essential new initiatives that the U.N. system must undertake to fulfil this potential. I would like to focus on two of them.

First, the Secretary-General spoke of the need for strengthened links with the Bretton Woods institutions. It is clear from our discussions yesterday just how critical this relationship will be, and UNICEF is actively engaged in strengthening these links. These efforts are in addition to our continuing work to strengthen the links with our key U.N. system partners such as WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA, WFP, UNDP and UNHCR. One part of our experience shows the value of strong collaboration in specific common endeavors. For example, the World Bank, with WHO and UNDP, was an early and enthusiastic partner in the Child Survival and Development Task Force that helped mobilize support for efforts such as Universal Child Immunization and the promotion of oral rehydration therapy. Earlier speakers have cited these

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efforts as among the most important undertaken by the U.N. system. Indeed, this international mobilization has already saved more than 10 million children's lives, some 4 million in the past year alone. In a similar vein, the World Conference on Education For All was another high priority initiative undertaken by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank.

At the same time, our experience has also shown that the United Nations system must also sometimes undertake a healthy policy dialogue with our partners in the Bretton Woods institutions. The Secretary-General mentioned UNICEF's experience in promoting Adjustment With a Human Face as an example. I believe the excellent remarks of Mr. Camdessus also underline the importance of this example. It is critical that we not shy away from the constructive dialogue when so much still remains to be done. A true partner is never merely an echo. The revitalized ECOSOC can play an important role in both strengthening our collaboration and promoting our policy dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions.

Mr. President,

A second point stressed by the Secretary-General is strengthening the work done by the U.N. system in the area of operational activities - above all in the field. Many of you have also emphasized improving governance for operational activities. We have seen a number of useful studies on this issue, especially those done by the Nordic Project which so usefully identified many principle issues under discussion here.

I have presented to the Executive Board ten points for U.N. reform on which I believe action can now be taken. We are deeply committed to moving forward with the reform process. In preparing my own ten points, I consulted with many of our key U.N. partners and built on our common experiences. The members of the Executive Board felt these proposals would be a useful input to the Council's deliberations, and I have attached them to this statement. The first two points stress the importance of mobilizing high-level political commitment through the use of international goals and strategies. These must be actively implemented through use of improved governance in the U.N. system, and I believe ECOSOC and the General Assembly are the place to achieve this. In my opinion, the past two days have shown the potential these two bodies have for providing such guidance. Our paper also proposes specific steps for improved governance in UNICEF, in part through building on the Executive Board's Bureau as a substantive steering and management body.

The remaining seven points focus principally on strengthening the U.N. system's collaboration at the country level. The critical foundation for such strengthened collaboration consists of common goals and strategies that represent the true priorities of the national government. Coordination mechanisms should then be flexibly molded around these key priorities. Since common goals are critical, we have proposed that the U.N. system help develop a common country strategy that focuses on four or five key themes that will have a major impact and for which inter-agency collaboration is vital. I intend to move forward with this proposal with my colleagues in the ACC.

Our ten points also include proposals for strengthening collaboration in each respective agency's programming process, as well as specific recommendations for strengthening the Resident Co-ordinator System. It will be critical that the Resident Co-ordinator be a person of proven development experience and capacity for team-building. Sub-groups that focus on key themes should be formed under the overall authority of the Resident Co-ordinator and chaired by the person best suited to the task. There have been several proposals for revising the way in which the Resident Co-ordinator is chosen and no doubt more suggestions will be made during this Session. These need to be reviewed in a systematic manner.

Our proposals also contain specific recommendations for a major increase in the number of unified locations for the U.N. system's field offices. We now have 14 common premises with UNDP and 25 more are underway. This total could be doubled if treated with urgency. We also make recommendations regarding common training, better collaboration in emergencies and stronger links with development agencies outside the U.N. system, including NGOs.

We will all have the opportunity to expand on these issues during the segment on operational activities. But I believe the discussion so far has been most encouraging. We have found strong support for better governance, stronger links between organizations, and more assured financing.

We have also seen a clear recognition of the importance of maintaining each organization's capacity to act effectively. We know that the diversity of mandates within the U.N. system can be a source of strength, if coordinated properly. For example, experience has shown the importance of UNICEF's mandate for advocacy for children, its ability to provide humanitarian support without political obstacles, its assistance in a rapid and flexible manner and the value of private sector support which goes beyond the \$200 million raised annually. Likewise, experience has also shown the need for clear chains of command and for governments to have direct access to expertise and decision-makers providing funding. It is clear to me that the proposals put forward in the interventions so far have built on these important considerations. As we all agree, our efforts to achieve improvements must preserve our proven strengths.

Mr. President,

Earlier in my statement, I spoke of the key role that the U.N. can play in helping to mobilize high-level political support around common goals and strategies. Summit meetings, such as the UNCED Conference or the World Summit for Children are of course vital in forging such political consensus. However, as other speakers have pointed out, these political commitments will not be fulfilled if ECOSOC and the General Assembly are not able to then play an active role in insuring implementation and providing operational guidance.

At this session, this Council has before it the very first test of whether governments will be able to play this role. The Secretary-General has submitted to you a Report on the implementation of the World Summit for Children held less than two years ago. The Report reflects a most heartening beginning. Over 130 countries have prepared or are actively

preparing National Programmes of Action to implement the goals of the Summit. These include both developed and developing countries. Developed countries have addressed the needs of their children and have also addressed the need to increase and more effectively provide ODA resources, as their heads of state promised when they signed the Summit Declaration. For their part, developing countries have formulated plans - often in considerable detail and with high-level political commitment - on how they will mobilize and restructure their efforts, so as to achieve the goals set by the World Summit.

The Secretary-General has put before you an encouraging summary of these efforts, including a summary of the work done by the U.N. system itself. We now face the challenge of how the Council and the General Assembly will respond. Can these central organs of the United Nations provide the governance and leadership we have spoken of in more general terms? Will your deliberations provide stimulus to the individual and collective efforts underway by Member States? Will you indeed be able to provide the system-wide policy guidance to the U.N. organisations that so many speakers have said is essential?

I submit to you that this first tangible test of our future system of governance is also one that is critical to the prospects for development. What better way to embark on our future governance than a focus on the future of all our communities and countries - our children. I urge that you give these considerations their full weight when this issue is discussed in the operational activities segment.