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Message from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
for the commemoration of
World Breastfeeding Week in Japan

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On behalf of UNICEF I would like to congratulate and thank Dr. Itsuro Yamanouchi, President Emeritus of the Okayama National Hospital, for organizing the first meeting of Japanese obstetricians, paediatricians and other professionals in commemoration of the first annual World Breastfeeding Week. We are particularly delighted that this very important initiative has been taken in Japan, where the infant mortality rate is the lowest in the world and the well-being of infants and children is the primary concern of its people.

Every day, between 3,000 and 4,000 infants die in the world from diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections because they were inadequately breastfed. Thousands more succumb to other illnesses and malnutrition. And yet the more science discovers about breastfeeding, the more its unrivalled position in human nutrition and development is confirmed.

Only a global effort involving both North and South can remove the barriers to breastfeeding and return to mothers the capacity for giving their babies the healthy start they deserve.

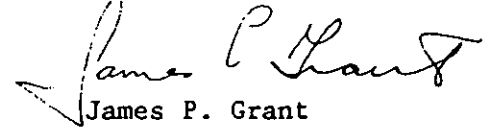
In recent years, we have witnessed two major breakthroughs with respect to the well-being of the world's children. First, Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, states that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration. Its Article 24 specifically notes the importance of appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers and the need to "ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, and the advantages of breastfeeding...."

Secondly, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and its Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children held on 29 and 30 September, 1990 is a universal appeal by 71 heads of state and government and senior representatives from another 88 countries to give every child a better future. It, too expresses the commitment of the political leaders to work to promote breastfeeding and safe motherhood.

Our success in promoting breastfeeding is literally a matter of life or death for many babies -- and for all of them, it will mean the best possible start both nutritionally and emotionally.

Hospitals and maternity centres can help get babies off to this good start by supporting and promoting breastfeeding. Unfortunately, many hospitals fail to do so. After many years of discussions with breastfeeding advocates, the major infant formula manufacturers have agreed to halt free and low-cost supplies of breastmilk substitutes to hospitals by the end of 1992. The World Health Organization and UNICEF are promoting a Baby Friendly Hospital initiative to get all maternity institutions to practice Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (see attachment).

I would therefore encourage all sectors of society to join in this process to re-establish a global breastfeeding culture in order to create a baby friendly world which guarantees every child a better life and a brighter future. Again, I wish your important conference every success.


James P. Grant
Executive Director