

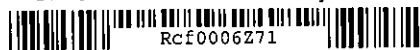
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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to the  
Second Committee of the General Assembly Operational Activities

United Nations  
26 October 1992



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Only a few years ago, the world was locked in ideological battle and the threat of nuclear conflagration cast a shadow over humankind's best hopes for social progress. In that era many considered it utopian to talk about meeting the basic needs of virtually every man, woman and child. It was taken for granted that such an undertaking would require resources far beyond anything available to the community of nations. Alleviation of poverty would occur, hopefully -- but by increments, over generations, rather than within our lifetimes.

With the end of the cold war, however, new thinking has rapidly gained legitimacy. In the early years of the 1990s, we have reached a new threshold in the struggle to overcome the worst aspects of poverty. Broad consensus now exists that the human being belongs at the core of successful development strategies. We now have the opportunity to put first things first. There is also an increasing awareness that such human-oriented strategies not only accelerate economic growth (as we have seen in East Asia), but can also greatly contribute to slowing population growth and supporting sustainable development.

These new times also offer a wealth of new opportunities within the United Nations system. However, to meet these new opportunities, I agree with many others that we must significantly reform and strengthen our ability to operate. The agenda item before us offers a key opportunity to begin that effort and I am grateful to Under-Secretary Ji for the efforts he has undertaken to present the triennial policy report. There are a number of key issues he has raised that I would like to underline, specifically:

- \* the need for common goals and strengthened governance;
- \* the need for common goals at the country level;
- \* the need for strengthened mechanisms at the country level; and
- \* the relevance of the Secretary-General's Report on the World Summit for Children.

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### Common Goals and Governance

At the international level, we need to adopt a coherent strategy and to set clear common goals. Agenda 21, the International Development Strategy, and the Declaration/Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children (an issue before you today) are all building blocks for common international strategies.

At the same time, we must be aware that to translate these visions into reality we need to develop action plans for the UN system. Translating visions into system-wide action plans will require a more effective structure of governance. As you know, for several years before this committee and before ECOSOC I have urged that you create such a capacity for system-wide governance. To be effective, governance must draw together all the UN organizations linking the analytical, the normative and the operational parts of the UN system. Furthermore, we must use this strengthened governance to help restore the UN system's capacity to provide leadership to the entire international development community.

For this reason, I believe it would be useful to move forward with the proposals for an "IDC function" that draws upon ECOSOC's Charter mandate for coordination of the entire UN system, including the specialized agencies.

### Common Goals at the Country Level

At the country level, the same basic principles apply. Policy objectives need to be set by governments -- in this case by the national government, and supported by international policies such as Agenda 21. To implement these objectives, the UN system needs a country-level action plan, embracing the operational activities of all UN agencies active in the country. Many of you know that we in UNICEF have pursued this for several years. UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director (Programmes), Dr. Richard Jolly, first proposed this to the ACC committee on operational activities (CCSQ/OPS) as chairman of that Committee three years ago.

We have continued to pursue this goal. As I promised at the High-Level Segment of ECOSOC, we have made a detailed proposal to the ACC for a UN Country Strategy. This proposal (copies of which are available in the back of the room) has now been fully accepted by the ACC -- ultimately by unanimity.

The UN Country Strategy will develop a unified response by the UN system to national plans and priorities. It will help identify key areas for attention where the UN system has a comparative advantage and where a unified approach can greatly enhance our effectiveness. The Country Strategy will be prepared with the participation of all the relevant parts of the UN system, including the specialized agencies, working under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator. In short, for the first time the UN system will have the necessary elements to develop a unified approach. But to succeed, this breakthrough must have your active support and guidance.

Strengthened Mechanisms at the Country Level

The new substantive opportunities at the country level must be supported by strengthened inter-agency mechanisms. Too often we set goals without such mechanisms, or we create mechanisms in a vacuum -- and thereby fail to build upon proven experience and structures that are working well.

The ACC agreement on the UN Country Strategy gives the Resident Coordinator the authority to be fully involved in all projects and programmes, from the earliest stages through each major step, so as to help ensure these efforts support the overall strategy. These new arrangements apply to activities of all the organizations of the UN system, regardless of the source of funding, and cover both operational and analytical projects. This will provide an unprecedented strengthening of the Resident Coordinator role. At the same time, the new arrangements require a team approach, with the Resident Coordinator forming sub-groups focussed on specific themes and chaired by the person best suited to the task. Likewise, the Country Strategy is intended to build on the programme preparation processes and mandates of each organization. It does not substitute for them.

We must now also accelerate our efforts toward a unified presence. UNICEF has proposed to our partners in the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (UNDP, WFP, UNFPA, and IFAD) that we increase by five times the number of common premises over the next three years. This will result in moving from approximately 20 countries where we currently have common premises to approximately 100. We are confident that our JCGP partners will respond positively and a cost and feasibility study has been commissioned. I also believe that we must seek to involve all the organizations of the UN system in sharing common premises.

We must accelerate a number of other initiatives as well. For example, in the recent past, JCGP has achieved the harmonisation of programme cycles, around the cycle of the government, in one-third of the countries we serve. UNICEF is committed to achieving this in two-thirds of the countries by next year and developing plans to address the special needs in the remaining countries (where, for example, emergency conditions often prevail). Likewise, we must consolidate the significant progress made in developing common training for country teams.

I recognise that these reforms will create major new responsibilities for the Resident Coordinator, as well as for the other Representatives from the UN system. This has many implications. As the Secretary-General's Report points out, we must now face the serious problems of work overload, along with the need for a broad base for selection of the coordinator and clear links to the Secretary-General.

We are prepared to do our part and make sure that a team approach succeeds. To help us achieve this we must count on the members of this Committee to make careful and specific decisions that build upon the strengths of the separate components of the UN system.

For example, one strength of UNICEF is its decentralised structure. 35% of UNICEF staff are at the country level and our Country Representatives have the authority to make most key decisions directly with their government counterparts, more so than any other UN organization. The UNICEF Representative acts fast and provides practical support. Nearly 80% of UNICEF assistance is in the form of supplies or cash -- and these are ordered on the spot. Our experience shows that giving such authority to our Country Representatives has been critical to success. Yet such decentralised authority is only practical because that Country Representative also has strong accountability directly to the Executive Director and the UNICEF Executive Board for carrying out established policies. Clear lines of management responsibility and accountability serve both donors and recipients and must be maintained.

Likewise, the UNICEF Representative carries out a mandate -- given by you, the members of the General Assembly -- that has unique elements for activities that I believe you want to protect. Because the needs of children are universally considered uncontroversial, you have given the UNICEF Representative exceptional mandates for advocacy and for operating in all areas, and with all parties, during times of conflict. For the same reasons, recipient governments give UNICEF unprecedented freedom to work within their societies, with numerous sub-offices outside capital cities. Moreover, virtually all governments support UNICEF's fund-raising from their citizens, which now totals some \$200 million annually. The results are clear -- from Universal Child Immunization to our efforts in Sudan, Central America, Iraq, Cambodia and many other places. Literally millions of children's lives have been saved because of the unique mandate you have given the UNICEF Representative.

In summary, I believe we can and must move forward in establishing a unified approach based on a common Country Strategy, with the necessary supporting mechanisms and a timetable for action. These efforts will considerably help in mobilizing the UN system behind the goals set by the Secretary-General in his Report on the Work of the Organization -- a document I have found particularly useful. In doing so, we must build upon the parts of the current structure that work well and above all ensure that we support effectiveness and avoid a lowest common denominator approach.

While I realise that emergency activities are not a major focus of this discussion, in the last six weeks I have visited the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Iraq, and I will be returning shortly to ex-Yugoslavia in order to launch a Week of Tranquility, beginning this Sunday, November 1st. From these visits, I am convinced that many lessons in emergency coordination must also be applied to our development coordination. Above all, I am deeply convinced of the wisdom of the General Assembly in establishing the Department of Humanitarian Affairs last year. It would be difficult to imagine how we would face the current difficulties without such a coordinating office. UNICEF intends to continue its strong support to Mr. Eliasson's leadership, which strengthens not only the cooperative actions of UN organizations, but also those of many bilateral agencies and NGOs.

The Secretary-General's Report  
on the Follow-up to the World Summit For Children

As I have stressed earlier, success in operational activities requires mobilising 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. But 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, you have before you 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 follow-up to the World Summit for Children, held less than two years ago. The Report reflects a most heartening beginning. Over 140 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. Many 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/government 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 mobilise and restructure their efforts, so as to achieve the goals set by the World Summit.

This momentum has continued since the Secretary-General's Report was prepared. The Summit goals, and the call for each government to prepare its plan of action for achieving the goals, have been reaffirmed by such recent Summits as those of the Non-Aligned Movement at its meeting in Jakarta, the Ibero-American Summit recently held in Madrid, the recent OAU Summit in Dakar, and the Ministerial Meeting of the SAARC States held in Colombo in September. Some major concrete results are already evident -- for example, not a single case of polio has been reported in the Western Hemisphere for more than one year -- but many more results will be required in the coming year.

The Secretary-General has put before you an encouraging summary of these efforts, including a summary of the work done by the UN system itself. We now face the challenge of how the General Assembly will respond. Can we use the United Nations system of governance to provide the 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 UN organizations 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 at this session.