

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1993-0001

2<sup>nd</sup> DRAFT

Address from Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
on  
New Years 1993  
to  
UNICEF Headquarters Staff

21 December 1992



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Rcf000721Z

Item # **CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01164**

ExR/Code: **CF/EXD/SP/1993-0001**

New Year's 1993 Address to Headquarters Staff from Mr. Jar  
Date Label Printed 21-Aug-2002

cover + 5 pp + 06

Draft # 2/21 December/R. Cohen

New Year's 1993

Dear Colleagues,

The decade of the 1990s, with all its changes and turmoil, seems determined not to let us catch our breaths. Each new year presents us with a world scene that is profoundly different from the panorama that confronted us at the outset of the previous year. This year, it seems to me that UNICEF's labor of love for the world's children is situated more solidly than ever before at the centre of the most powerful and dynamic forces for progress of our times. Simultaneously, we face an array of humanitarian emergencies and post-Cold War conflicts that take the international community into challenging but uncharted waters, and open new modalities for assisting those in distress. I am certain that all of us will take up the new challenges that await us in 1993, with the same passion, discipline, and efficiency that you invested in the extremely demanding tasks of the year that has just ended.

Much happened in 1992. We saw the paper promises of 1990 -- arising out of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children -- incorporated into the practical action agendas of the majority of countries worldwide. You have now encouraged 127 nations to convert the Convention into the law of their lands ... and the everyday practice of societies. You helped

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over 130 governments elaborate detailed plans -- and, often, budgets -- for reaching the year 2000 World Summit goals for children and women, a process that was given a decisive boost by the series of regional meetings held in Colombo, Mexico City and Tunis over the past few months, culminating in Dakar, with the ground-breaking International Conference for Assistance to African Children. You helped ensure that all our goals for children and women were incorporated into the historic Earth Summit's Agenda 21, which provides the international community with a roadmap for dealing with environment and development well into the next century. You have helped sustain high levels of immunization throughout the developing world, and helped breastfeeding to make a global comeback through the successful first stage of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and the cut-off of free supplies of infant formula to maternity institutions in the Third World.

At year's end, we contributed to the development of new approaches to tackling the critical problem of hunger and malnutrition, at the International Conference on Nutrition, held in Rome. And throughout the year, of course, we pushed forward solidly with our programmes of cooperation in 128 developing countries -- soon to be joined, for the first time, by nine especially hard-pressed countries of Central/Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States -- bringing the global promises of 1990 closer to realization.

But 1992 also saw a deepening and proliferation of emergencies -- in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Liberia, Sudan, and Iraq, among others -- challenging us and the rest of the international community to provide some measure of relief and protection to the innocents who are now the primary victims -- even targets -- of today's conflicts. With the U.N.-sponsored military intervention in Somalia, the international community is enforcing the right to food and life, moving boldly along an ethical trail blazed in years past by UNICEF with a variety of partners. Having visited Somalia and Iraq once and former Yugoslavia twice since August 1992, I am well aware of the severe risks and sacrifices involved in this latest phase of emergency work, especially where central authorities are weak or absent and battle-lines are drawn and redrawn from day to day, hour to hour. To the families of the three courageous UNICEF staff killed in the line of duty in 1992, our most sincere condolences. To our colleagues on the front line -- in conflict areas, in situations of drought, at the Copenhagen supply centre, in Geneva and Headquarters, and especially, to those engaged in the day-to-day work in each country -- I wish to express my deepest admiration and gratitude. UNICEF is proud of you -- and together with the rest of the UN system, we are doing everything we can to enhance your security and improve your difficult working conditions.

Now that most countries are engaged, for the first time in history, in medium- and long-term planning for children and women, and are implementing their NPAs, we at UNICEF have a major opportunity, particularly in 1993, to help shape a global development agenda that not only has a human face, but a human heart. In this time of great change, it is becoming increasingly possible to rid the world of poverty's most brutal manifestations, and every one of you has a chance to play an important part in this great transformation.

To ensure that we play a still more effective role in this crucial process, we will be holding a series of regional consultations in the early part of the year, with special emphasis on carrying forward our support for NPAs and the achievement of our mid-decade goals. Since not everyone will be able to participate directly, I would like to invite each and every staff member to contribute ideas and suggestions on how we can improve our work -- and this includes, certainly, being better as an institution, as a workplace, as a mirror of the kind of world we want for our children.

We enter the New Year six thousand strong. When I started my tenure in 1980 we were less than three thousand. Our doubled numbers only partially reflect the increased expectations on us. As the world looks to the United Nations for more and more solutions, our performance and processes come under greater and

greater scrutiny, so we must run a "tight ship", with unimpeachable management practices and a corporate determination to use our limited resources with exemplary efficiency. Recently, we came through a rigorous two-year multi-donor evaluation with an essentially good bill of health. You were given high marks for delivering the life-saving services which are making a difference to the children of the developing world. But they said we needed to be better at capacity-building and empowerment in order to ensure the sustainability of your extraordinary efforts.

I am confident that 1993 will see this fascinating, 46 year enterprise called UNICEF become an even better custodian of humankind's love for its children, and that we will work with even more wisdom, imagination, team spirit and idealism. Let us work together with our partners on building a global movement to meet basic human needs, and particularly to protect children -- a movement in which each and every one of us has an important role to play.

Finally, I thank each and every one of you for the heroic and the routine work of 1992, for the everyday tasks and the overnight and weekend emergencies, for the conscience you bring with you to work each morning. I wish you all, and yours, a happy, healthy, and satisfying new year.

James P. Grant