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Remarks by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Memorial Service for Sean Devereux

New York  
8 January 1993

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**Remarks by Mrs. James P. Grant**  
**Executive Director United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**  
at the

**Memorial Service for Sean Devereux**

New York - 8 January 1993

We gather together today, as at the beginning of last year for Dr. Martinka Dumpalova, to mourn the death and honor the memory of another one of our colleagues who worked and died in Somalia, coming to the aid of children -- Sean Devereux.

He died as a pioneer, a frontiersman. Sean gave his life for a new ethos in the world, one that responds to the international community's responsibility for innocent civilians, particularly children and their mothers, trapped and traumatized by terror and conflict.

As recently as five years ago, the world had not organized itself effectively to meet the terrible needs of civilians, caught up in the many wars around the globe. The Red Cross, NGOs, church agencies joined often by UNICEF, sought in many conflicts to succour the wounded, feed the hungry and meet the needs of the millions displaced from their homes. But the results were usually very partial, usually only tokens of solidarity. They did not receive the massive support needed, but bravely made their way to the frontline, sometimes under fire, to carry on their humanitarian work.

Sean died in the midst of just such chaos, brought on by war. We are saddened but not surprised that fate should have overtaken him in just such a dangerous place as Kismayo, for he had been serving valiantly in just such places, that required great courage before.

The difference this time is that thanks to such brave frontiersmen, pioneers, in relief to their fellow humans, their actions have triggered a massive global response commensurate with the need. A process which began four years ago with OLS in Sudan and has reached a new level of international response and hundreds of thousands will now not die. Sean did not die in vain! Sean Devereux was remarkable young man: a sportsman, teacher, volunteer and relief worker -- a man full of spirit and commitment.

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Sean's background shows us this commitment to children and to Africa. Following two years as a physical education teacher in England, he went to Liberia in 1988 as a volunteer teacher working in the Catholic Mission School, where he taught English, social studies, religion and sports. While in Liberia the civil war erupted and Sean was recruited by the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Emergency Operations in Liberia, serving first as a volunteer, then as a logistics consultant.

Sean's first job with the United Nations was to supervise the distribution of food for over three hundred thousand displaced and other affected persons in the capital city of Monrovia, which had been cut off for six months from virtually all international assistance. Sean was then transferred to World Food Programme in Guinea where he assisted Liberian refugees fleeing the civil war. Then, once again he returned to Liberia, in November 1990, and joined United Nations Disaster Relief Office assisting the UN to re-establish relief operations in Monrovia.

Sean is remembered by those who worked with him for having also unstintingly devoted his time to caring for several hundred abandoned and orphaned children, many of whom had no other home at that time but he alleys and streets of Monrovia.

As the UN Emergency Relief Programme extended throughout all areas of Liberia, Sean was called upon to set up one of the UN operational centres, namely that in Zwedru, the area in Liberia most ravaged by the civil war,

In September 1992 he was recruited by UNICEF Somalia to work as a logistics officer in the southern port town of Kismayo. In that capacity, he acted as officer in charge of all UNICEF operations and was specifically involved in providing assistance to 50,000 internally displaced Somalis who sought refuge in Kismayo.

I have spelled out the details of Sean's career in Africa as they show, vividly, his willingness to work in the most difficult areas, often on the front line in civil wars. These actions bear testimony to his personal and professional commitment to humanitarian concerns and the survival and well being of children in particular.

Sean gave his life to help create the new world ethos I spoke of earlier. This rapidly emerging ethos is symbolized by the involvement of the Security Council and the global community, most recently by sanctioning intervention by more than 30,000 troops in Somalia, solely to safeguard the provision of humanitarian assistance, ensuring people the right to life and food.

In any such evolving ethos there are always advocates who are well known and come to represent specific movements for human rights, against slavery, against imperialism. Such names as Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King come immediately to mind. Similarly, there are also the many unsung heroes working on the frontline, out of the spotlight, toiling for the ideals of humanitarianism and children.

Sean, by his actions and deeds, is one such hero, a frontline leader who toiled and died for a great cause: the cause of the rights of civilians, in particular women and children, to be assisted and protected in good times and bad and especially in conflict situations. Sean devoted his life, and ultimately gave his life for others. He will be forever remembered for that. My sincere sympathy goes out to Sean's family, his parents, his two sisters and other relatives. We feel for you who raised and shaped Sean as you too attend a service for Sean in England today.

I am pleased that his family has decided to establish the "SEAN DEVEREUX LIBERIAN STUDENT FUND" to promote the development and education of children in Liberia. I would like to end by paraphrasing from the statement made on setting up the fund. "Seans's great love of children was what initially led him to Africa. He wanted to give the children there the same opportunities he had been given. Sean saw the solution to the problems in Liberia and in Somalia to be the children. They were the future and he aimed to help them develop so that THEY would make the world a better place. With this wish it is the aim of the Fund to continue his work."

UNICEF has lost a friend, a colleague and committed staff member who has, by his death, further forced the world community to take sides, to move beyond neutrality and come down to the side of protecting and assisting civilians and particularly children caught up in conflict.

We will surely miss Sean, but we will never forget him.