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Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
1993 International Development Conference

Washington, D.C.
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"Children and Women -- The Trojan Horse Against Mass Poverty?"

Permit me to begin with a few friendly provocations:

* **First**, I would suggest that nobody -- not the West, not the United States, nobody -- "won the Cold War". No one emerges unscathed, unblemished or unburdened from half a century of bitter ideological warfare, near bankrupting arms races, distorted economies and global competition that made cooperation to solve urgent global problems extremely difficult and often virtually impossible.

* **Second**, I would argue that in our haste to proclaim the victory of the ideas of democracy and free markets -- the "End of History" -- we are doing these powerful ideas a profound disservice. Democracy, once defined as "liberty plus groceries", clearly has to take care of much unfinished business on both scores. As my friend Mahbub ul Haq said recently, "Markets are not very friendly to the poor ... either nationally or internationally". The problems that challenge and vex us on the threshold of the 21st century require a radical re-ordering of priorities, a sea-change in the habits, values and life-styles of all humankind -- not a reliance on "business as usual".

* **Third**, in spite of the gravity of the problems we face, I would venture to say that we have made more global human progress in the last 50 years than in the previous 2,000, to the point that three-quarters of the world's population now enjoy the basics of a life of dignity, productivity and health -- progress achieved while much of the world freed itself from colonialism, and while respect for human

and political rights expanded dramatically. Since the Second World War, average real incomes in the developing world have more than doubled; life expectancy has increased by about a third; infant and child death rates have been more than cut in half; the proportion of the developing world's children starting school has risen from less than half to more than three-quarters (despite a doubling of population); and the percentage of rural families with access to safe water has risen from less than 10 per cent to almost 60 per cent. What we have not seen, however, is the automatic trickling down of economic and technological advances to the world's more than one billion poor, whose numbers continue to grow at roughly the rate of population growth. The most obscene manifestation of this failure is the 35,000 child deaths each day, two thirds from causes now readily preventable at low financial cost.

* **Fourth** provocation: the problem is not that we have tried to eradicate global poverty or even its worst symptoms, and failed; it's that no serious and concerted attempt has ever been made. The respectable achievements of recent decades in parts of the world have come about in spite of the generally low priority and meager resources allocated to human development -- almost as an after-thought of a world preoccupied with other concerns. Now that the Cold War is over we can try -- for the first time.

* **Fifth**: rather than requiring several generations of effort and astronomical economic resources, it is now actually possible to provide virtually every man, woman and child on earth with adequate food, clean water, safe sanitation, primary health care, family planning, and basic education -- by the end of the century and at an affordable price. Thanks to recent advances in science and technology, and to the recent and ongoing revolution in communications and social mobilization, we estimate that an additional US\$25 billion per year is all that would be needed to achieve this massive and truly historic breakthrough -- two thirds of that amount from the developing countries themselves and one third from the industrial

world. The U.S. share of such an effort would be an additional US\$2 billion a year -- a significant sum but less than what we Americans spend monthly on beer -- and most, probably all of this, could be obtained through restructuring existing official development aid (ODA) flows.

* **Sixth:** far from taking away from much-needed efforts to slow population growth, spur environmentally sustainable development, improve equality for women, and strengthen democracy, an all-out assault on poverty's worst manifestations is now a precondition for resolving these burning issues of our times. It is no coincidence that countries with the highest illiteracy and child death rates also have the highest birth rates. Overcoming the worst aspects of poverty would accelerate progress on all these fronts simultaneously and sharply lower the costs involved.

* **Seventh:** perhaps it's as the Bible says: a little child shall lead them. We need to put children first, paying special attention to the girl child; we need to give children's essential needs a "first call" on society's resources, whether times are good or bad. If you think about it for a minute, this simple principle endorsed by the world's leaders at the 1990 World Summit for Children has vast revolutionary potential. Children and women can be our Trojan Horse for attacking the citadel of poverty, for undergirding democracy, dramatically slowing population growth, and for accelerating economic development.

* **Eighth and final provocation:** if the United States were to provide genuine leadership, including, importantly, at the presidential level, to a global effort to overcome those worst aspects of poverty identified at the 1990 World Summit for Children and at the 1992 Earth Summit, it would do more good ... for more people ... more quickly ... at a lower cost -- than though any other conceivable global undertaking in this era.

You will forgive me for framing these thoughts as provocations; judging from the rich and thoughtful agenda you have ahead of you at this important conference, it is not you who need

to be provoked. These challenges, of course, face us all -- all of us who are concerned about the perverse persistence of poverty as we approach the 21st century. I commend you on your choice of theme for this conference, for it places you on the cutting edge of what is possible in these critical times. Coming on the eve of the inauguration of a new U.S. administration, this conference can help inaugurate a new and much-needed movement to end the disgrace of poverty at home and abroad, a movement that can, incidentally, greatly enhance global moral leadership by the United States.

Anyone who thought, amidst the initial euphoria of dizzying change starting in 1989, that the end of the Cold War would usher in an idyllic age of global harmony and easy solutions, has long since been disabused of the notion. I confess to having indulged in some wishful thinking myself in the wake of these extraordinary, unprecedented transformations. But, of course, every day, we open our newspapers to dark headlines confirming that the world is still a very dangerous place -- in some ways, more dangerous than before -- and we are confronted with a host of old and new problems reaching crisis proportions. As they say, it's a tough world out there -- and I'd add, in here, too. An environmental crisis that threatens to add humans to the list of endangered species ... the hard-to-comprehend hatreds and rivalries leading to the "failing States' tragedy" in Somalia, former Yugoslavia and elsewhere ... the mind-boggling problems of transition in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe ... the unpayable African foreign debt ... AIDS ... hopelessness and desperation in Haiti ... the astronomical U.S. deficit ... racism, crime, drugs, the L.A. riots -- it's difficult to enumerate all the seemingly intractable problems we face in today's world.

What all this hides, however, is that because of other recent developments the world is on the threshold of being able to make vastly greater progress on many longstanding issues than is generally recognized. I see some analogy here to what happened in the mid-1960s with regard to hunger in Asia. Old hands in the audience will recall the early 1960s scientifically documented gloom and doom scenarios of population growth in Asia outrunning food supply, leading to projections of massive famine, chaos and global instability in the last third of this century. But then, quite suddenly, within 4-5 years, there was the Green Revolution in Asia, extending from the Philippines to Turkey. Why then? The miracle wheat strains had been around for some 15 years. But it was only by the mid-1960s that the surrounding environment became propitious for rapid expansion, for going to national scale. Only by then, thanks in part to the Point 4 Programme, had fertilizer and pesticide use and controlled irrigation become widely practiced and readily available, thanks in large part to earlier aid programmes. And, equally important, the combination of Asian drought and increasing awareness of the population explosion created the political will at the highest levels to drastically restructure price levels for grains and inputs, and to mobilize the

several sectors of society required for success. President Lyndon Johnson's deep personal involvement remains a largely untold story. I would argue that we are in a similar position today on a much broader front -- encompassing basic education, primary health care, water supply and sanitation, family planning, gender equity, as well as food production -- covering a much wider geographical area, now including Africa and Latin America, as well as Asia. But success requires increased top level political will, particularly from the United States.

If we can overcome the worst manifestations of poverty we'd be going a long way toward eradicating poverty itself, because frequent illness, malnutrition, poor growth, illiteracy, high birth rates and gender bias are not only symptoms, but also some of the most fundamental causes of poverty. Accomplishing this, we could anticipate -- from the recent population experiences of such diverse societies as Sri Lanka, Kerala, Costa Rica, China and the Asian NICS -- a far greater reduction in the rate of population growth than most now believe possible; we'd be giving a major boost to the fragile new democracies that desperately need to provide some early measure of tangible improvement in the lives of the bottom half of their societies in order to survive; and we know from the experience of the South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and the other Asian NICS that it would accelerate economic growth. By breaking what we could call the "inner cycle" of poverty, we would strengthen the development process' necessary assault on the many external causes of poverty, rooted in such diverse factors as geography, climate, land tenure, debt, business cycles, governance, unjust economic relations, and so on.

In short, there are few if any causes today more urgent, more deserving of priority treatment, than overcoming the worst aspects of poverty -- poverty which contributes not only to vast human misery, but also to fueling the global population explosion, environmental degradation, political unrest and economic stagnation. The World Bank estimates the number of people in poverty in 1990 at 1.13 billion, an increase of 80 million compared with 1985. That's about a fifth of the world's population living on less than \$1 a day. Even more discouraging, the Bank projects the number in poverty at the end of the century as 1.1 billion, no real improvement over today.

Meanwhile, the number of countries designated as "least developed" by the United Nations went from 30 to 42 over the course of the 1980s. For most of Africa, Latin America and much of the Middle East, rising debt, declining commodity prices and tough retrenchment and adjustment policies have slowed growth and cut the pace of social progress attained in the sixties and seventies. Although growth has resumed in much of the developing world over the past few years, the international economic climate and the biased structure of international relations continue to work against further progress. We are witnessing the increasing

marginalization of the least developed countries, with sub-Saharan Africa as the most dramatic example.

At the same time, poverty has increased significantly in a number of industrialized countries over the past decade, most notably in the United States and the United Kingdom and, of course, the transitional countries of Eastern Europe and the former U.S.S.R. What is particularly galling about this development in the United States and the United Kingdom is that poverty worsened during the relative prosperity of the 1980s. Poverty worsened and there was -- not coincidentally -- a radical upward redistribution of wealth making the very wealthy few very much wealthier. And children bore the brunt of it. One in five American children are poor today -- as Marian Wright Edelman reminds us, the highest level of child poverty in a quarter century in the world's richest country. In both the United Kingdom and the United States, child poverty doubled over the past decade.

A world of difference may separate inner city Los Angeles, Mogadiscio and the new poor of Moscow, but it is not difficult to see that many of the distinctions will surely seem irrelevant to the hungry, deprived and frustrated in all three places. If we continue to turn our backs on the plight of the poor, or ask them to wait patiently for better days, we will reap a whirlwind for all humankind -- a political, economic and environmental whirlwind that will shake even the prosperous and long-time democracies to their foundations and condemn us to a new international order of permanent conflict and instability.

What is it, you can reasonably ask, that makes the present such a ripe time for achieving historically unprecedented progress in overcoming so many of the worst symptoms of poverty? What is it that makes the mid-1990s so analogous -- with respect to these symptoms -- to the Green Revolution breakthrough of the mid-to-late 1960s? It is, as I noted earlier, the parallel evolution of recent scientific and technological advances, and of the revolutionary new capacity to communicate and mobilize large numbers of people, which now enables national and world leaders to produce dramatic results when these various resources are combined and problems are addressed in a multisectoral fashion.

We see this clearly demonstrated in the universal child immunization (UCI) effort which since the mid-1980s, in the largest peace time collaborative effort in world history, has established a system which now reaches virtually every hamlet in the developing world and is saving the lives of some 10,000 children a day -- more than 3 million a year. There, too, the vaccines had been available for some 15-30 years. It was applying the new techniques of communicating and mobilizing to the immunization effort, often personally lead by heads of state and government and involving millions of television and radio spots, school teachers, priests and imams, local government officials, NGO workers as well as

health personnel, that has resulted, by 1990, in more than 80 per cent of all children in the developing world being brought in 4-5 times for vaccinations before even their first birthday. As a result of these pioneering new multisectoral techniques, built on the earlier Green Revolution experience in Asia, Calcutta, Mexico City and Lagos today have far higher levels of immunization at ages one and two than New York City, Washington D.C., or the United States as a whole.

A similar process is now underway with respect to oral rehydration therapy (ORT) against the single greatest historical killer of children -- dehydration from diarrhoea. ORT had been invented in 1969, but it was only as the new techniques of communications and organization have been mobilized by national leaders that this lifesaver has gone to national scale, and is now saving the lives of more than 1 million children per year, a figure which could easily more than double by 1995 with increased national and international leadership.

Our arsenal is now well-stocked with new technologies and rediscovered practices which can be similarly put to scale with inspired leadership and modest additional financial resources. Thus, the simple iodization of salt would remove the single largest cause of mental retardation in the world: the iodine deficiency that cripples many millions annually. The universalization of vitamin A through capsules or vegetables would remove the single largest cause of blindness in the world. The scientific rediscovery of the miracles of mother's milk means that we now know that more than a million children would not have died last year if only they had been effectively breastfed for the first months of their lives. We are learning from such diverse countries as Zimbabwe, Bangladesh and Colombia that it is possible to get virtually all poor children, including particularly girls, through primary education at very low cost. Recent advances have shown how to halve the costs of bringing safe water and sanitation to poor communities, to less than US\$30 per capita.

Our new capacity to communicate -- to inform and motivate -- enables us to empower families, communities and governments to give the first vulnerable months and years of a child's life something of the protection and nurturing which is given as a matter of course to our children fortunate enough to be born into affluence -- we are learning how to "outsmart" poverty at the outset of each new life. And it is strong national leadership and international cooperation that can make the difference between slow and dramatic progress.

A revolution has started in the developing world with respect to children. This is manifested by the fact that developing country leaders took a major lead in seeking history's first truly global summit -- the World Summit for Children in 1990 -- and in pressing for early action on the Convention on the Rights of the

Child, adopted by the General Assembly in November 1989 and which in record time has been signed or become the law of the land in more than 150 countries -- with the United States now being the only major exception.

Leaders throughout the Third World are learning that there are good things which can be done for families and children at relatively low cost, if only they would provide leadership, and that it can be good politics for them to do so. More than 130 countries are actively working on National Programmes of Action (NPAs) to follow-up on goals set by the World Summit for Children, all of which were incorporated into Agenda 21 at the Earth Summit in Rio last summer. More than half of these programmes -- some 80 -- have been completed to date, and others are expected out shortly, including the U.S. NPA due out later this week. Regional ministerial-level meetings have been held in recent months in Latin America, South Asia and Africa, as well as the Arab world, on collaborative follow-up to accomplish these goals, whose achievement would result in an historic overcoming of many of the worst symptoms of poverty in this decade.

Our own experience in UNICEF shows that it was possible -- even during the darkest days of the Cold War and the 1980s' "lost decade of development" -- to mobilize societies and the international community around such "doables" as I've mentioned, building a sustainable momentum of human progress. We called it the Child Survival and Development Revolution, and as a result more than 20 million children are alive today who would not otherwise be, and tens of millions are healthier, stronger, and less of a burden upon their mothers and families. If it was possible to make significant gains then, vastly greater progress should be possible now. It should be possible to leverage the ongoing revolution in the name of children and women into a global movement capable of dealing a death blow to many of poverty's worst manifestations during the 1990s.

This, then, is the playing-field on which we find ourselves today. I'd say, in baseball terminology, that the bases are loaded and the United States has an opportunity to knock in at least a few runs, if it acts expeditiously in coming months.

A week from tomorrow, the first wholly post-Cold War administration will take office in the United States, and it comes in with a public mandate for change during this time of great challenge and opportunity. As I mentioned earlier, the United States has in the past decade been retrogressing or stagnating in many areas of children's well-being while much of the developing world has been making impressive progress. All that has been accomplished globally has been done, frankly, with little active U.S. leadership, except from a bipartisan Congress. Now think of what could be accomplished if both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue were to exercise, together, the kind of leadership that's needed and

take the initiatives on this front that go to the heart of the effort to eradicate poverty! By increasing investment in American children and strengthening American families, and by reordering foreign assistance to reflect this new priority, the United States, the world's sole superpower, would once more set the global standard and give a major boost to human development and economic growth at home and abroad.

The outgoing administration, to its credit, has recently taken a bold initiative in Somalia, blazing an historic trail that the new administration will certainly have an opportunity to explore and further develop for the world. For those of us who carried the banner for the right to food for many years, it is especially gratifying to see the international community, led by the United States, enforcing this right in Somalia for solely humanitarian purposes. It has occurred, of course, in response to a situation of massive retrogression and brutality, and it remains to be seen what this intervention will ultimately mean in terms of the world's tolerance levels toward the "silent emergencies" which take the lives of 13 million children a year in the developing countries. I would like to believe we are entering a new era of humanitarian concern, of renewed commitment to human development, to children and women, to the human core of the development process.

What can the United States do, right away, to help lead the way? Many things, but I'll list a few thoughts that relate most directly to the themes you will be addressing over the next two days:

*** The Convention on the Rights of the Child.** Few actions would have more immediate impact or symbolic weight than the President's signing this historic "Bill of Rights" for the world's young early in 1993. The President's signature of the Convention and its speedy submission to the Senate for ratification (as has been urged by bipartisan leadership) would send an important message to the world.'

*** Second, the United States National Programme of Action to implement the commitments made at the World Summit for Children.** To be issued this week, this plan to achieve the commendable goals set by the World Summit, that apply to children of developing and industrial countries alike, could provide a useful base for initiating bipartisan actions. I trust that the much-needed re-ordering of priorities for children, women and families will proceed without delay.

*** Third, we need 20/20 vision.** I'm referring to the call issued two years ago by the United

Nations Development Programme first for developing countries to devote at least 20 per cent of their budgets to directly meeting the priority human needs of their people (they're devoting little more than 10 per cent today), and, second, for 20 per cent of all international aid for development to directly support those priority areas of human need: primary health care, nutrition, basic education, family planning, and safe water and sanitation. On average, less than 10 per cent of already inadequate levels of ODA are devoted to that purpose today. Norway leads the industrialized countries with 19.7 per cent and Germany brings up the rear with only 1.9 per cent of ODA going to these priority areas. The U.S. is in the middle, at 8.3 per cent, or US\$695 million for these areas. This latter figure would have to be increased by US\$1 billion in order to reach the recommended 20 per cent mark. This could be accomplished by FY1994 by restructuring current flows. As I mentioned earlier, US\$2 billion is the projected American share of the extra US\$25 billion yearly that will be required globally by mid-decade to meet the World Summit year 2000 goals. A small price to pay for saving some 50 million lives and moving into a leadership role on the cutting-edge issues of our time.

* **Fourth, African debt.** The new spirit of democratic change and economic reform moving in Africa today simply cannot long survive the financial hemorrhage of paying an average US\$1 billion in debt service to foreign creditors every month for over a decade. Sub-Saharan Africa's debt is now proportionally 3-4 times heavier than Latin America's debt. As the economist Percy S. Mistry recently wrote: "Debt initiatives for middle-income countries have finally begun to make a difference ...BUT the debt initiatives aimed at the low-income countries (mainly in Africa) have not made a sufficient dent in their debt problems; these continue to mount and are being obscured only by the expedient but damaging accumulation of arrears. The measures taken so far by creditors for African LICs have been inadequate, invariably too late, and need to be substantially strengthened". At the recent OAU-sponsored International Conference on

Assistance to African Children, in Dakar, donor countries and lending agencies pledged to do more to promote debt relief and cancellation, while making an effort to expand ODA, in support of actions directed at child survival, protection and development. Here again, the U.S. could help lead the way to a solution to the African crisis. Why not have this summer's G-7 Summit definitively address African debt, with much of the local currency proceeds going to accelerate programmes for children, women and the environment? With the right mix of domestic and international support, and with apartheid ending in South Africa, we could see a burst of human development leading to dramatic progress in most of Africa by the year 2000. I am convinced that this could include a food revolution every bit as green as Asia's, but significant debt relief will be needed in addition to top leadership, so that African countries can acquire the fertilizers, pesticides, pump and other inputs they urgently need to get it going.

* **Fifth, actively supporting multilateral cooperation.** With human development and poverty alleviation increasingly accepted rhetorically as the cutting edge for development cooperation in the 1990s, the United States has a major opportunity in the months and years immediately ahead to transform rhetoric into reality. Active U.S. support and leadership along these lines in the World Bank, IMF, the regional banks, and throughout the UN system, including the prospective landmark conferences on human rights, in 1993; on population, in 1994; and one on women and another on social development in 1995, will go a long way toward assuring success in this historic effort to overcome, in our time, the worst aspects of poverty in the South, where it is most acute, as well as in the North and in the transitional societies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

* Sixth, and finally, **strengthening the commitment to the United Nations.** Restoration of U.S. funding for the United Nations Population Fund and a return to UNESCO would not only give an important boost to family planning and global education, but -- together with full payment of its arrears -- it would signal solid, long-term United States' commitment to the United Nations as the global village's central vehicle for development cooperation and safeguarding the peace.

Thank you for hearing me out today and for putting up with my list of friendly provocations. I am certain we are on the same wavelength and that this conference will make the kind of waves these times demand. Success in overcoming the worst aspects of poverty will not solve all the world's problems but it would make an historic contribution to the better world we all seek. As I said before, the bases are loaded. History is inviting the U.S. to bat -- and why shouldn't Americans aspire for the United States to be Babe Ruth and hit a Grand Slam!

YEAR 2000 goals - World Summit for Children

The following goals have been formulated through extensive consultation in various international forums attended by virtually all Governments, the relevant United Nations agencies including the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and a large number of NGOs. These goals are recommended for implementation by all countries where they are applicable, with appropriate adaptation to the specific situation of each country in terms of phasing, standards, priorities and availability of resources, with respect for cultural, religious and social traditions.

Overall goals 1990-2000

- One-third reduction in under-five death rates (or a reduction to below 70 per 1,000 live births whichever is less).
- A halving of maternal mortality rates.
- A halving of severe and moderate malnutrition among the world's under-fives.
- Safe water and sanitation for all families.
- Basic education for all children and completion of primary education by at least 80%.
- A halving of the adult illiteracy rate and the achievement of equal educational opportunity for males and females.
- Protection for the many millions of children in especially difficult circumstances and the acceptance and observance in all countries of the recently adopted Convention of the Rights of the Child. In particular the 1990s should see rapidly growing acceptance of the idea of special protection for children in time of war.

Protection for girls and women

- Family planning education and services to be made available to all couples to empower them to prevent unwanted pregnancies and births which are too many and too close and to women who are too young or too old.
- All women to have access to pre-natal care, a trained attendant during childbirth and referral for high-risk pregnancies and obstetric emergencies.
- Universal recognition of the special health and nutritional needs of females during early childhood, adolescence, pregnancy and lactation.

Nutrition

- A reduction in the incidence of low birth weight (less than 2.5 kg.) to less than 10%.

- A one-third reduction in iron deficiency anaemia among women.

- Virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency disorders.

- All families to know the importance of supporting women in the task of exclusive breastfeeding for the first four to six months of a child's life and of meeting the special feeding needs of a young child through the vulnerable years.

- Growth monitoring and promotion to be institutionalized in all countries.

- Dissemination of knowledge to enable all families to ensure household food security.

Child health

- The eradication of polio.

- The elimination of neonatal tetanus (by 1995).

- A 90% reduction in measles cases and a 95% reduction in measles deaths, compared to pre-immunization levels.

- Achievement and maintenance of at least 90% immunization coverage of one-year-old children and universal tetanus immunization for women in the child-bearing years.

- A halving of child deaths caused by diarrhoea and a 25% reduction in the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases.

- A one-third reduction in child deaths caused by acute respiratory infections.

- The elimination of guinea worm disease.

Education

- In addition to the expansion of primary school education and its equivalents, today's essential knowledge and life skills could be put at the disposal of all families by mobilizing today's vastly increased communications capacity.