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Talking Points for Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
for
The IDB-UNDP Forum on Social Reform and Poverty

New York
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MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director

From: Robert Cohen

Date: 5 February 1993

Subject: **Talking points for IDB-UNDP Forum on Social Reform and Poverty**

The Forum is sponsored by UNDP and IDB and will take place at the Bank's headquarters in Washington 10-13 February. You have been invited to speak for about 10-15 minutes at the luncheon on Thursday the 11th. The following talking points are based on input from UNICEF TACRO, our HQs geographical office, the background document prepared for the Forum, UNICEF's Children of the Americas, and your speech on Latin American NPAs in Mexico City last October.

1. There are few if any causes today more urgent, more deserving of priority treatment, than overcoming the worst aspects of poverty -- poverty that contributes not only to vast human misery, but also to fuelling the global population explosion, environmental degradation, political unrest and economic stagnation. The extraordinary political and economic changes of the past 4-5 years, together with recent advances in science, technology and communications, make it possible to provide virtually every man, woman and child on earth with adequate food, clear water, safe sanitation, primary health care, family planning, and basic education -- by the end of the century and at an affordable price (an extra \$25 billion per year by mid-decade). If we can overcome the worst manifestations of global 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,

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rooted in such diverse factors as geography, climate, land tenure, debt, business cycles, governance, unjust economic relations, and so on.

2. Children and women can be our Trojan Horse for attacking the citadel of poverty, for undergirding democracy, dramatically slowing population growth and accelerating economic development. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which entered into law in 1990, has already become the law of the land of 128 countries. 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 1990 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.

3. Latin America has been leading the way. President Salinas de Gortari of Mexico was one of the six presidential conveners of the World Summit for Children. More heads of state participated in that first-ever global summit from Latin America than from any other region of the world. With the exception of Haiti, all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the two Ibero-American summits, the region's heads of state and government stressed the importance of fulfilling the promises of the World Summit for Children, and Central America's governments have decided to closely coordinate their efforts on behalf of the young. National Programmes of Action to implement the goals of the World Summit for Children have been finalized or are in draft form in 22 countries of the region, with NPA preparation underway in 9 others. That means that 97% of the children of Latin America and the Caribbean are now covered by government plans to significantly improve their well-being by the end of the decade. A truly new, revolutionary breakthrough, I'm sure you will agree.

4. Latin America and the Caribbean have seen remarkable advances in recent decades, particularly in the field of health -- in spite of the extraordinary difficulties and setbacks caused by the debt crisis and economic recession of the 1980s. On average, a child born today in the region will live more than eight hours longer than one born yesterday; one born tomorrow will enjoy a life that is eight hours longer than one born today, and so on... This adds up to people in Latin America and the Caribbean living 11 years

longer than they were thirty years ago. This formidable increase is primarily due to the halving of under-five mortality achieved during that same period; from a high 161 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1960, the child mortality rate dropped to 59 per 1,000 in 1990. This in turn can be attributed, in part, to increasing coverage with vaccines that prevent the six major childhood diseases. A decade ago, less than half of the region's children were immunized; in 1990, the region reached the UCI goal of 80% coverage -- and, for the last year and a half, has been without a single case of polio, leading the world toward polio eradication!

5. But, as you all well know, the same statistics that reflect undeniable progress also conceal great disparities that persist between and within countries of this region -- social and economic disparities so great that we could speak, with some justification, of the parallel existence of two entirely different worlds within the region: one developed, the other underdeveloped; one rich, the other miserably poor. The ECLAC secretariat reports that in 1990 196 million people in Latin America (45.9% of the total population) are living below the poverty line. This means that the percentage of poor people in the population has risen by about 2.5% from its 1986 level. A million children under five years of age are still dying of largely preventable cause each year. After a period of social sector cutbacks and weakening of social safety nets, the region's governments are beginning to make poverty reduction a priority, an effort that will undoubtedly be assisted by the return to growth in a growing number of the region's countries. It is vital that adjustment -- and the entire development process -- be given a "human face"; that economic growth be accompanied by equity; and that the region's democratization process continue and deepen in the years ahead.

6. Investment in people -- starting with children and women -- is the key to breaking the transmission of poverty from generation to generation. Through well-designed, adequately-staffed and sufficiently-financed national and community programmes in nutrition, primary health care, early childhood development, primary education and care and support of mothers and families, a synergism can be created to give poverty alleviation and development a significant boost. UNICEF believes that emphasis needs to be placed on the following areas, among others:

- * creating conditions for responsible parenting. Early, late and too frequent pregnancies are associated with high infant and maternal mortality.

- * ensuring access to maternal and child health care programmes so that poor women receive the attention and support they need before, during and after childbirth, that they are empowered to breastfeed their babies, and that their

children receive basic health care and nutritional support.

* expanding day care and pre-school education for low-income sectors.

* expanding and improving the quality of primary schooling.

* providing vocational training and work-study programmes, especially for street children.

* ensuring that the social safety net (and all transfers) strengthens the family -- in particular, poor families and single mothers and their children.

7. We estimate that compliance with the goals for the year 2000 would prevent the deaths of 1.9 million under five years of age. In addition, 86,000 fewer mothers would die; 30 million additional students would be enrolled in primary schools; and severe malnutrition would be reduced in more than half a million young children. An additional 99 million people would gain access to safe drinking water; 156 million more to sanitation services. 24 million fewer adult illiterates would result.

7. At the close of the NPA evaluation and follow-up meeting in Mexico City last October of officials from 19 Latin American countries, the Tlatelolco Declaration on Behalf of Children urged:

* implementation of NPAs through active participation of NGOs, social organizations and private enterprises together with coordinated government initiatives;

* emphasis on decentralized, local level activities;

* greater budgetary support for NPAs through increased public expenditures on social development or through recovery mechanisms;

* creation of information systems to evaluate programmes;

* coordination of involved agencies and institutions;

* permanent networks to exchange personnel and technical and information resources;

- * innovative programmes to enable parents to contribute better to their children's well-being;

- * periodic regional follow-up and evaluation meetings.

The participating countries also agreed to convene a regional technical meeting in 1993 on NPA financing, follow-up and evaluation. I do not hesitate to say that the region has taken a giant step forward -- particularly through its NPAs -- in improving the prospects for the survival and development of its children and women.

8. I am happy to note that this process is receiving enthusiastic support from diverse sectors, ranging from NGOs and the Catholic Church to private enterprise and the media; the regional bodies and sister agencies of the United Nations system, most notably UNDP and PAHO, along with the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, are working in an increasingly coordinated fashion on social policy, poverty alleviation and human development. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Inter-American Development Bank for its support of Central America's efforts to help children in especially difficult circumstances and for supporting the PROANDES programme aimed at reducing child mortality in the Andean countries. We look forward to signing, in the near future, an agreement between UNICEF and the IDB to facilitate ongoing financial and technical collaboration to improve the lives of children in Latin America and the Caribbean.