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Statement by James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
on visit to
Peking Union Medical College Hospital

Beijing, China
1 March 1993



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It is a very special privilege today to be able to return to PUMA to visit the hospital where I was born and near which I spent many of the early years of my life. The occasion of this visit makes my return even more meaningful. Near the end of last year I was delighted to receive the news that the PUMC Hospital had been certified as on of the first group of "baby-friendly" hospitals in china. Not only does this have great personal significance to me, but more important, it provides an outstanding example to China and the rest of the world of a premier medical institution taking the lead in making significant changes in its health care practices. The health care system, especially at the highest levels is not known for its willingness to make drastic changes, particularly in such a short time. We therefore must congratulate the foresight and courage of PUMC and the twenty-one other hospitals in China who have achieved or nearly achieved "baby-friendly" status within less than a year since the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) began in China.

By the end of 1992 PUMC Hospital and the other twenty-one hospitals in China joined more than 500 hospitals around the world who were close to or had been officially recognized as "baby-friendly" by their implementation of the "Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding". As I mentioned in the most recent issue of the BFHI News, "the world has clearly navigated the turn back towards breastfeeding". As part of the BFHI UNICEF and WHO will continue to work with health systems around the world to transform all hospitals into "baby-friendly" facilities by December 1995.

An important additional component of the BFHI has been to take action to eliminate the donation of free and low-cost supplies of breastmilk substitutes being given to maternity institutions and hospitals. By the end of 1992 more than 100 developing countries either had taken such action or had never had such marketing practices. I would like to commend the Chinese Ministry of Public Health for initiating action through its circular to all provinces and its leadership role in drafting the National Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. In regard to the latter, it will be essential for the Code to be enacted into law during the forthcoming National People's Congress in order to make further

progress on this issue. The members of the International Association of Infant Food Manufacturers have pledged to end free and low-cost distribution of its products wherever governments have acted. We are very hopeful that country actions, global monitoring and industry cooperation will stimulate full enforcement of government directives throughout the developing world by June of this year.

Building on the success of the BFHI, it is recognized that in many countries the lack of protective legislation for breastfeeding mothers makes it difficult for them to exclusively breastfeed for the recommended four to six months. Therefore, attention is now being given to the fourth goal of the Innocenti Declaration, which specifies that by 1994 all governments will have enacted legislation "protecting the breastfeeding rights of working women". During this year, UNICEF and WHO will work with the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action in global effort to promote what we are now beginning to call the "mother-friendly workplace".

The increased emphasis on good breastfeeding practices made possible by these world wide initiatives must be seen as an important part of the broad mobilization to live up to the convention on the Rights of the Child and achieve the goals established at the World Summit for Children and in each National Plan of Action. As we work on expanding the BFHI and other important initiatives we must not lose sight of the children for whom these initiatives mean life or death, or a normal productive life or one hampered by disease and poor nutrition. In China, the leadership of the Ministry of Public Health and hospitals such as PUMC to mobilize all levels of government and society to move toward these goals for children is one of the greatest and rewarding challenges of a life time.