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Address by James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Round Table on the Papel Document
"Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity"

Trusteeship Council, United Nations
New York
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It is an honour to have been given the opportunity to participate in this important event. I would like to thank the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations and the "Path to Peace Foundation" for organizing this forum on a topic that could not be more timely or relevant to the work of the United Nations and to international efforts to create a better, more "people-friendly" world. The Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People are to be commended for the excellent document we have before us -- "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity". It is indeed a challenge to the conscience of the world to open its arms to uprooted people everywhere, and an eloquent appeal to the international community to address the root causes of increasing refugee flows and the rise in the number of internally displaced people in today's world.

We have just heard about the plight of refugees from the world's leading authorities in this field. They have presented an indisputable case for stepped-up, concerted international action. Improving the condition of refugees -- indeed, removing the conditions that cause people to flee their countries in search of protection -- is clearly one of the burning issues of our time. It is, fortunately, one of the critical problem areas for which the United Nations has long had a clear mandate and a consistent institutional response of significant quality. It is not for nothing that UNHCR has twice merited the Nobel Peace Prize and I for one believe it merits a third.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Sadako Ogata for her inspiring leadership and the entire staff of UNHCR for the courage and dedication they display, day in and day out, working under increasingly complex and often dangerous conditions. This recognition extends, of course, to UNRWA, ICRC, and the many international and national NGOs that are doing so much for refugees, with special commendation for the refugee agencies that are supported by the Catholic Church and other religious denominations -- key partners in all humanitarian relief efforts.

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As you know, UNICEF and UNHCR, founded in 1946 and 1951, respectively, have a long history of close collaboration. UNICEF's original mandate was to provide relief to children among displaced and refugee populations immediately following World War II, and both organizations first concentrated their efforts in war-devastated Europe. This collaboration continued even after UNICEF's mandate was recast in 1950 to give priority to development assistance to Third World countries by focusing on the developmental needs and rights of children and women. However, while maintaining development as its central thrust, UNICEF today remains extensively involved in humanitarian relief activities in cooperation with our U.N. sister agencies, including refugee assistance under the lead of UNHCR. We are providing relief supplies and services to refugees, displaced populations and returnees in dozens of countries -- most notably Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Palestine, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Mozambique, Liberia, Cambodia and Sudan -- as part of emergency programmes in 54 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, at the same time as we seek to help scores of millions of children in distress through development assistance in more than 120 countries.

As is the case in so many other situations of hardship and emergency, it is the most vulnerable who bear the heaviest burden: children and women constitute the vast majority of refugees; refugees are overwhelmingly from the ranks of the poor; and sub-Saharan Africa, hardest hit of all regions by poverty and underdevelopment, accounts for the greatest number of refugees. Just providing refugees with the essentials -- the food, medicines, shelter, safe water and sanitation needed for survival -- is a major challenge. It is a challenge, I am happy to say, that the international community is increasingly able to meet. But the international community also has the responsibility to do all that is humanly possible to restore some semblance of normalcy to the daily lives of refugees, even within the rigid constraints of camps and isolated border regions.

School for children; training and work for adults; seeds and tools for production; health education for all; support for those suffering from trauma; the development of participatory forms of decision-making and encouragement of female leadership; peace education and conflict resolution training -- these are among the needs crying out to be addressed in a more holistic and creative fashion by those of us working with refugee populations. When a refugee is trained to administer vaccines -- instead of a technician from outside -- the immunization is against despair and apathy as well as against disease. When the refugee population is involved in the planning and implementation of water supply and sanitation programmes, relief becomes preparation for rehabilitation and development.

Refugees cross two lines simultaneously: by crossing an international border they also cross a line that separates national responsibility from international responsibility. Since their own government's jurisdiction no longer reaches them and therefore can no longer protect them or provide for them -- or, indeed, because their own government has renounced that responsibility -- responsibility for the refugees' well-being is assumed, under international law, by the international community, represented first and foremost by UNHCR. The world has established a minimum safety net for refugees. Whenever people are forced into exile -- whether they are a thousand or fifty thousand -- experience shows that refugees can expect UNHCR to be on the scene in a matter of days or, on the outside, a matter of weeks. Camps are quickly set up to provide shelter, food, and a package of basic services. Although examples of compassion for refugees can be found throughout history, this kind of regime of global protection and assistance is a modern innovation, an expression of solidarity reflecting, I would hope, moral progress, but at the very least the 20th century's new logistical, communications, and transport capacity to mobilize assistance to a particular category of the needy.

This is not yet the case with respect to internally displaced populations -- people who leave their homes and communities to escape persecution, conflict, environmental degradation and natural disaster, but who for one reason or another do not cross those two lines I mentioned before: international borderlines and lines of international responsibility. The internally displaced are more numerous, more dispersed and usually harder to reach than refugee populations. In the post-cold war world -- with the break-up of States and the proliferation of ethnic and religious conflicts -- the ranks of the internally displaced will almost certainly continue to swell, responsibility for their well-being will come increasingly under question where central government authority is weak, contested or absent, and the line between internal and external refugees will become blurrier as populations criss-cross borders as tactic of survival.

When they are fleeing floodwaters, volcanic eruptions or some such natural calamity, internally displaced people can usually count on international relief and assistance -- and the responsibility for their well-being is retained by their government, which requests and channels the aid. This is as it should be, and UNICEF -- which has development programmes in 130 countries -- is regularly called on to respond to these emergencies, along with a range of other U.N. and NGO partners. When a village with two wells sees its population swell from a thousand to three thousand or ten thousand, we are often expected to help drill new wells and install pumps on an urgent basis to try and meet increased demand for safe drinking water. The increased water supply remains after the crisis subsides, so you have a

dovetailing of relief and development, but in many cases, the increased demands of such emergencies force short-term relief and long-term development efforts into competition with one another -- with the airlifted, hard-currency based emergency relief usually costing far more per capita beneficiary than does the development assistance to empower the poor trapped in their silent emergency. Indeed, you could compare most aspects of emergency relief to expensive curative medicine and development assistance to low-cost, preventive public health. The world -- albeit selectively and inconsistently -- has basically decided that it has to address both kinds of needs, but it is clear that there are trade-offs and limits on the resources side. That is why fundraising for emergencies and fundraising for human development programmes are usually done separately, and why we make every effort to build rehabilitation and development components into relief programmes.

When civil strife or massive violations of human rights are what cause people to flee, the situation is different. Internal refugees are basically on their own. Repressive, authoritarian governments have slaughtered millions and conducted pogroms against minorities, religious and ethnic groups and political opponents behind a shield of State sovereignty for ages, often in full view of international public scrutiny. Until recently, sovereignty and Cold war rivalries tended to provide ideological cover for atrocities and systematic violations of human rights. The international community's hands were largely tied so long as the victims did not acquire refugee status by crossing international borders -- until 1989, that is. It was in Sudan in that year that the international community, for the first time, really, was empowered through the U.N.-sponsored agreement of the two principal parties to the conflict to come to the aid of internally displaced people on a massive scale. The world invested some \$400 million in Operation Lifeline Sudan, a pioneering humanitarian intervention in the midst of civil war that saved hundreds of thousands of lives. The concept of "corridors of peace" was soon extended, with the blessing of the Organization of African Unity, to Ethiopia, Angola and Liberia.

UNICEF also helped to develop an earlier modality of reaching vulnerable populations caught in civil strife, which contributed to the "corridors of peace". Since the mid-1980s, we have worked with governments, armed guerrilla movements, the ICRC and the churches to develop the concept of children as a "zone of peace". In several civil conflicts -- most notably El Salvador and Lebanon -- agreements have been hammered out among the parties in conflict to stop fighting for certain periods of time -- known as "days of tranquillity" in pre-defined areas to permit the delivery of food and medical supplies, and in particular the immunization of children. These "days of tranquillity" and "corridors of peace" are now regularly carved out of war to benefit children. In fact, the concept was formally endorsed at the 1990 World Summit for

Children and is embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which entered into force as international law that same year. Among its almost one dozen provisions relating to the rights of children trapped in wars, the Convention -- in Article 38 -- states that:

"In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict..."

The World Summit for Children Plan of Action is more explicit, stating:

"Recent examples in which countries and opposing factions have agreed to suspend hostilities and adopt special measures such as 'corridors of peace' to allow relief supplies to reach women and children and 'days of tranquillity' to vaccinate and to provide other health services for children and their families in areas of conflict need to be applied in all such situations. Resolution of a conflict need not be a prerequisite for measures explicitly to protect children and their families to ensure their continuing access to food, medical care and basic services, to deal with trauma resulting from violence and to exempt them from other direct consequences of violence and hostilities."

What is key here is that it is now often possible to obtain the agreement of political and military adversaries to cease fire to permit limited forms of humanitarian assistance for displaced civilians, particularly for women and children.

But things have swiftly evolved in the past two years, to the point where humanitarian action is possible; in certain circumstances, even when a government does not agree -- or when there is no government to agree with. The critical step was taken in early 1991, when the Security Council ordered assistance and protection to the displaced and persecuted Kurdish population in Northern Iraq in the wake of the Gulf war. UNICEF today is lead agency, under the Department for Humanitarian Affairs mandate, for helping the displaced population in the North, working under international protection, even as we carry out our country programme to assist all Iraqi children, and even as we work to modify an international sanctions regime that, through direct and indirect effects, has contributed to increasing the country's child mortality rate. This year, the world will spend about \$150 million to assist the three to four million Kurds in northern Iraq, and UNICEF has 40 people -- among them, some of our best -- posted there.

Most recently, a further ethical bridge was crossed when the Security Council authorized armed international intervention in Somalia to protect an entire people's right to food and survival. Less interventionist is the current international involvement in the former Yugoslavia, but the intention of providing some measure of protection and assistance to innocent victims is clear, and the decision to establish an International War Crimes Tribunal reflects a significant lowering of the world's threshold of tolerance toward massive violations of human rights.

As for the often blurry line between refugees and the internally displaced, a promising experiment is under way in the border areas of the Horn of Africa that attempts to address the constant movements of populations who regularly cross and re-cross international boundaries in search of assistance and protection. "Zones of prevention" have been established on either side of the Ethiopia/Kenya and the Somalia/Kenya borders, respectively, in which relief and development agencies are closely collaborating with an eye to slowing the tide and facilitating return and self-sufficiency. As an alternative to crossing the border for assistance in refugee camps, the internally displaced are being given seeds and tools as an encouragement to re-establish themselves in their own countries -- a helping hand that also serves as an incentive to refugees to leave the camps and return home. Assistance is also being provided to the local Kenyan population who have many of the same needs as those who have taken refuge in their country, but who would not normally qualify for refugee aid. This flexible, preventive and integrated approach could serve as a model for use in other vulnerable areas.

How far we have come from the days when the world routinely closed its eyes or turned its back on massive suffering in other countries! Permit me to offer a single example, from personal experience, of the way things were within the span of my working years. I was in Calcutta at the tail end of the 1943-44 Bengal famine when over a million people starved to death in a purchasing power famine -- i.e., the grain stores were full but landless labourers simply could not pay the inflated prices for food. The British Raj did little and people dropped like flies, as they did in a very similar famine in Ireland a century before.

Much has happened along the road from Calcutta in 1943-44 to Mogadicio and Bosnia today. The technological and communications revolution has gradually transformed the world both into an increasingly interdependent global village in which it is no longer possible to conceal large-scale famine or violence and into a world community which has the capacity to meet the essential needs of all people. The "loud emergencies" which are now brought live into our homes through the magic of tv satellite links, create an inescapable compulsion on governments to act, at a time when there is a vastly increased capacity to act. This is most welcome.

Morality marches with changing capacity. More positively, this new communications capacity has permitted deprived and oppressed populations everywhere to see how much better people live just around the corner in the global village, and this awareness has recently powered movements for democracy that have overthrown authoritarian regimes and torn down the walls of the cold war, transforming international life completely.

But where does this leave the "silent emergencies" of massive malnutrition, disease and illiteracy, affecting mainly the world's one billion poor, who in numbers are a multiple of the refugees and displaced combined? Of the 35,000 children who die each and every day of the year in the developing countries, some two to three thousand are victims of the "loud emergencies" of violence and famine; the rest succumb, quietly but just as terribly, to largely preventable hunger and illness. No earthquake, no flood, no war has taken the lives of a quarter million children in a single week; but that is the weekly child death toll of the "silent emergency" associated with poverty and underdevelopment. In 1992, the number of deaths of children under five years of age brought about by "loud" emergencies, which horrified and shocked the world, was about 500,000, a small proportion of the 13 million children who died last year and who will die this year. The tragic deaths of 1,000 children per day in Somalia last year captured much more public attention than the 5,000 children who died worldwide every day from dehydration caused by diarrhoea, which can be prevented and treated easily.

A decade ago, a child carried across an international border by refugee parents had rights to assistance and protection that that child's brother or sister left behind with an aunt or an uncle simply did not enjoy. Responsibility for such things was always vested, exclusively, in national governments, communities and families. The international community's role was to be supportive of government efforts and there was little that could be done when those efforts were few and far between or when governments went beyond neglect to open abuse of its citizens.

Over the decades, the notion that wealthy countries should help poor countries develop has made some headway, although the international goal of allocating 0.7 per cent of GNP to ODA remains elusive and even current levels of assistance (at half that proportion) are now in danger. We can all point to many healthy and inspiring cooperation efforts, but honesty forces us to admit that there is, really, no institutionalized safety net for the internally displaced or for the poor, as there is for refugees.

Because UNICEF's sphere of development action is children, and because our assistance has been provided in a strictly non-political way, we have enjoyed considerably more "space" than other organizations cooperating with governments. The international

community has told us we must not restrict ourselves to providing life-saving supplies, but has given us an also-life-saving advocacy role as defenders of children and their rights. We have sought to exercise this special role seriously and responsibly, but it is not difficult to see what tensions can crop up between cooperation with governments and advocacy for the poor. As an illustration, just last week we denounced the systematic rapes and other atrocities against children in former Yugoslavia before the Commission on Human Rights -- even as we continue to work impartially with Muslims, Serbs and Croats throughout the Balkans to gain access to children and their families. Our work has become easier overall, I must say, as leaders and politicians have understood that helping children can be "good politics" and as the tide of democracy has risen round the globe in recent years. The Convention and the World Summit for Children formalized and further raised the new ethical priority on meeting children's basic needs and respecting their rights.

In this context of evolving international responsibility toward alleviating people's suffering -- be they refugees, internally displaced or simply poor -- the world must rapidly come to terms with the reality of increasing demands being placed on ever more severely limited resources. How many operations can the international community afford to mount to rescue the victims of failed States, as in Somalia? It is estimated that the U.S. component alone of the Somalia operation will cost over \$900 million, for just three months involvement -- comparable in amount to UNICEF's global budget for all purposes in 1992, much of it going to prevent future crises. I would be the first to say it's worth spending two or three billion dollars or more to save two or three million people -- after all, even a single life is priceless -- and we should be able to carve a progressively larger peace dividend out of the post-Cold War era to cover such eventualities. But it would be naive to expect taxpayers to foot the bill for endlessly proliferating emergencies and conflicts. The world of the 1990s is turning out to be more complex and dangerous than anyone imagined just two or three years ago. In addition to the strife in Africa and the Balkans, there are over 45 civil and ethnic conflicts in progress around the globe.

This is neither a plea to use the bottom line as an exclusive means of deciding where to put our resources nor a call to turn our backs on the victims of "loud emergencies". What I am saying is that humankind must invest far more than it is today in prevention of emergencies and conflicts, even as we go about the world putting out fires. The Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace stresses prevention and makes the critical link to development and democracy. This investment in prevention will prove far less costly -- and produce far greater results -- than reliance on expensive and not-always-effective rescue operations.

The investment that needs to be made is basically two-fold: we need to move quickly to alleviate poverty's worst manifestations early in the lives of our children, in order to help break the cycle that perpetuates poverty from generation to generation. Secondly, we need to invest in peaceful coexistence and tolerance, in democracy.

Immunization is perhaps the best example of what we can now accomplish with the extended reach of modern technology, communications and social mobilization. Today, 80 per cent of the world's children -- some 100 million -- are receiving immunizations against the six child killer diseases on five separate occasions before their first birthday, an effort that is saving over 3 million lives every year at a cost of approximately two to three dollars per child. The price tag for meeting all the year 2000 goals for children and women set by the world's leaders in 1990 amounts to \$25 billion extra per year. The developing countries are trying to come up with two-thirds of that amount by reordering their domestic priorities and budgets, while the remaining third -- just over \$8 billion per year -- needs to come from the industrialized world in the form of increased or reallocated ODA and debt relief. This is a small price to pay for meeting the basic needs of every man, woman and child in the developing world in nutrition, basic health, basic education, water and sanitation, and birth spacing within this decade, through relieving the symptoms of poverty to help remove its causes. But will we pay it? The world is still far more responsive to meeting the needs of "loud emergencies" than to meeting the needs of the "silent emergencies" which, if not addressed, can erupt into "loud emergencies".

In summary, the dynamic of change on the threshold of the 21st century increasingly requires a holistic response to inter-related global problems and provides an historically unprecedented opportunity for human solidarity and progress. Efforts to protect and assist refugees naturally link up with efforts to protect and assist internally displaced populations, which in turn are linked to efforts to promote democracy and human rights, to promote development and alleviate poverty, to preserve the environment and improve the situation of women and children -- all within the framework of promoting peace and security. It is in this context that we welcome the initiative of the Holy See to bring us together today. These linkages compel us in the U.N. system to collaborate more closely than ever before and to make changes where "business as usual" will no longer do. The reforms being implemented under the leadership and vision of the Secretary-General are taking us in the right direction. In the area we are discussing today, the establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has already made a difference in the way the U.N. system responds to emergencies.

At the same time, we must reject, with every ounce of humanity and reason in us, the frightening trend toward xenophobia, the upsurge of violence, racism and hatred against refugees we have witnessed in recent years, particularly in the industrialized countries of both East and West. The economic and social difficulties of our countries do not justify, by any stretch of the imagination, such poisonous hostility and intolerance. We must change the mind-set that views refugees as burdens, and instead, see them as the social and economic assets that they are. Rather than ever more restrictive policies of exclusion that go against the traditional hospitality shown the persecuted and the needy, what is needed is global cooperation aimed at preventing the conditions which make people leave their countries and their communities in the first place.

A great deal remains to be done if we are to take advantage of the opportunities afforded us by the 1990s as a result of the end of the cold war and the expansion of democracy in much of the world. I can assure you that UNICEF will do all that we can to ensure that the United Nations rises to the historical occasion ... for the children, our collective future.