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Message from James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
for delivery to
the Ministerial Conference of
the Organization of the Islamic Conference

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**MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND, MR. JAMES P. GRANT,
FOR DELIVERY TO THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE
KARACHI, 25-29 APRIL 1993**

Mr. President, Honorable Ministers, Your Excellencies, Honorable Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed an honour for me to be accorded this opportunity to send a message to such a crucial conference of Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This meeting takes place against a background of challenge throughout the world and among the Islamic nations.

As your agenda shows, from Afghanistan to the Middle East, from Bosnia to Somalia, to name only a few, you have weighty political matters to address.

Permit me to take this opportunity to congratulate the Organization on the major role that it has played in the promotion of peace in Afghanistan. This is a field in which the OIC has unique potential. UNICEF stands ready to work shoulder to shoulder with your organization and with your Governments in efforts to relieve the suffering of the innocent victims of armed conflicts.

I do not need to remind you that in each area of crisis and emergency, no aspect of the situation is more worthy of your attention than the plight of children. In today's global village, with instant communication, all of us are only too aware that in modern warfare it is the women and the children who suffer the most.

In the last decade, more than one and a half million children have been killed in wars, more than 4 million have been physically disabled: limbs amputated, brains damaged, eyesight and hearing lost through bombing, land-mines, firearms and torture. Five million children are in refugee camps because of war; a further 12 million have lost their homes.

Before 1945, most victims of war were soldiers. In the 150 wars and major conflicts since then, 80% of the 20 million dead and 60 million wounded have been civilians, most of them women and children.

The indirect effects are almost as devastating. Schools and clinics are closed or destroyed. Food and medical supply lines are cut off; water and sanitation systems break down.

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The Plan of Action adopted by the historic 1990 World Summit for Children states: "Children need special protection in situations of armed conflict... Resolution of a conflict need not be a pre-requisite 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 hostility."

In addition the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically demands "all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict".

The principle needs to be put into practice urgently and wherever there is civil strife. Experience shows that it can be done when there is political will. In Lebanon, "days of tranquillity" allowed children to be vaccinated. In Sudan, both sides eventually agreed to "corridors of peace", through which essential supplies could reach millions of civilians, mostly women and children, trapped in the war zone. Similar agreements have since been negotiated in Angola, Ethiopia, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. In Iraq, essential medical supplies were delivered even at the height of the Gulf conflict. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, a week of tranquillity to get winter relief supplies to children was negotiated in November 1992.

I am heartened by the positive role that the OIC and its Member Governments are playing in many of these areas of crisis.

These situations of conflict clamour for our action by their stark immediacy. They must, they will have our attention. At the same time we must remember the death and suffering of children in the silent emergencies of our planet.

Every year, in the Member Nations of the OIC, five million children die of preventable diseases and many millions more suffer from the effects of malnutrition and ill health which will scar them for life, physically, intellectually or emotionally.

That is the bad news. The good news is that millions of lives have been saved in the Muslim world in recent years by the implementation of low-cost measures already available. I am speaking of immunization, of oral rehydration therapy to counter the effects of diarrhoea, of a return to breastfeeding rather than bottle-feeding, and also of simple iodized salt solutions to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders. And if this is the good news, then there is even better news to come.

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The December 1991 Dakar Summit of your organization made important decisions for further action. Resolutions concerning children and women were adopted in support of the realization of the World Summit for Children Summit goals. These Resolutions called for:

- a) organizing a symposium on the participation of women in social development;
- b) organizing a symposium on child rights in Islam;
- c) convening ministerial conferences on issues related to child survival and development and women;
- d) formulating an Islamic plan of action within the framework of the World Summit for Children Declaration for OIC Member States.

Since then twenty-three Islamic nations have prepared National Programmes of Action for Children. I sincerely hope that each and every one of your countries will very shortly complete this process and vigorously pursue implementation.

There is a growing international consensus that some half a dozen of the World Summit for Children goals can be achieved by the end of 1995. I hope that all Member Governments will ensure that these targets are incorporated in their NPAs and subsequently in their respective national development plans with adequate budgetary allocations towards social development. They are:

- a) to raise immunization coverage levels achieved for the Universal Child Immunization (UCI) effort to at least 80 per cent against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, poliomyelitis and tuberculosis;
- b) to ensure 90 per cent of coverage against measles, by far the most lethal of the vaccine-preventable diseases, and of tetanus toxoid for women of child-bearing age;
- c) to achieve 80 per cent use of oral rehydration therapy in order to prevent dehydration caused by diarrhoea;
- d) to virtually eliminate iodine deficiency disorders;
- e) to virtually eliminate vitamin A deficiency and its consequences;
- f) to encourage exclusive breastfeeding for four to six months, and sustain breastfeeding for up to two years of age and beyond, with complementary foods beginning at four to six months;
- g) to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There is general agreement that developing countries must demonstrate that children are the priority they claim them to be. With this in mind, it is recommended as a general "rule of thumb" that 20 per cent of Government budgets be devoted to human development with special attention to the needs of women and children in basic education, in primary health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and family planning. Donors are asked to acknowledge such commitment by, in turn, targeting 20 per cent of their aid to these human development priorities.

As an even more immediate target, permit me to reiterate the need for the Convention on the Rights of the Child to be ratified by those Member Governments that have not yet done so. Worldwide, one hundred-and-thirty-one out of one hundred-and-eighty nations have ratified the Convention. Among OIC countries, twenty-nine out of fifty-one have done so. Until now, the ratification process has advanced globally at an unprecedented pace. You may wish to ask your secretariat to keep a tally of ratifications and to report to the next OIC Summit on progress toward obtaining 100% ratification of this landmark human rights treaty.

On this same topic, I know that Member Governments are planning a strong showing at the World Conference on Human Rights, to take place in Vienna, 15 - 24 June 1993. UNICEF is looking to the Islamic nations to bring their concerns for children's and women's rights to that important gathering, especially with regard to some of the crises I referred to earlier. We shall have a strong team there, ready to give technical support to delegations within the areas of the UNICEF mandate.

Such collaboration will fall within the framework of the Cooperation Agreement between our two organizations, signed as long ago as 1982. At the 1991 OIC Summit in Dakar, a UNICEF team was on hand to provide technical support concerning children's issues. More recently, your distinguished Secretary-General was kind enough to send one of his accomplished Assistant Secretaries-General, Ambassador Mohsin, to New York to discuss issues of common concern with me and UNICEF colleagues.

Within the framework of UNICEF/OIC cooperation, agreement was reached on a work programme for following-up on the decisions concerning women and children which were taken at the Sixth Islamic Conference held in Dakar in December 1991. The main areas of cooperation are: child rights, protection of children and women in war situations, debt relief and fundraising, basic education for all with specific emphasis on the girl child.

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If this Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs so decides, UNICEF stands ready to give all possible technical support for the meetings on children and on women called for at the Dakar Summit.

I believe the stage is set for yet closer cooperation between the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the United Nations Children's Fund, for the benefit of the children of the Islamic Umma and, indeed, for children everywhere. I pledge the fullest support of UNICEF to this noble enterprise.

Thank you very much.