
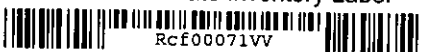


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Remarks by James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
on
Presenting the 1993 Maurice Pate Award
to the
People and State of Ceará, Brazil

United Nations – New York
26 April 1993

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Wherever it occurs, human progress is a source of joy. But when it is made where conventional wisdom tells us the obstacles are too many and the odds too great, it is an occasion for genuine celebration. Thus, today we celebrate the people and leadership of Ceará, a State located in Brazil's poverty-stricken Northeast, whose 6.4 million population is more than that of Denmark or Costa Rica. With the help of far-sighted government leadership, Ceará's people -- punished for centuries by conspiracies of drought, authoritarian rule, neglect and lack of opportunities -- have begun, in recent years, to turn things around. Spectacular progress has been made in Ceará for children.

In 1986, the population elected Mr. Tasso Jereissati as Governor, and four years later elected Mr. Ciro Gomes as his successor. Each in turn were deeply concerned about the plight of children, and made improving their lives the centerpiece of their administrations. A number of committed citizens who had previously worked on children's programmes were brought into government. But it was clear that with limited budgets and weak infrastructure, conventional government approaches alone simply would not reach the unreached. The active participation of civil society would be decisive. Thus, a very broad range of sectors were brought together to work on a far larger scale than ever before. They built on admirable work that was already being carried out by a number of individuals and organizations, among them the Catholic Church, represented here today by Sister Matilde, State Coordinator of the Child Pastorate; and professional groups, represented by Dr. Jocileide Sales Campos, President of the Ceará Pediatrics Society.

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Ceará's Governors decentralized authority and administration to encourage initiative and accountability in the provision of services; mayors have taken up the challenge and shown a remarkable commitment to children's well-being. A veritable army of community health workers was organized, represented here today by Ms. Maria Elieriza Ferreira, President of the Health Agents of Ceará and by Ms. Otaviana Alice Leite, from Barbalha municipality -- one of the region's poorest towns -- who was chosen by lot to be here from among the State's more than 7,000 community health workers. Through these committed grassroots health promoters and activists, the government has the means to cast its social safety net far and wide. Prevention and education are the watchwords of Ceará's health system, combined with low-cost, high-impact interventions such as immunization and oral rehydration therapy to combat the main causes of child mortality and illness. The mass media play a most important role; they not only report on health issues, but also actively collaborate in health campaigns, educating and mobilizing the population. Business leaders have been supportive from the outset.

In Ceará, government and people -- working together -- have obtained remarkable results in record time. Since the percentage of children who survive to their first birthday is a revealing overall measure of progress, the one-third reduction in infant mortality obtained in Ceará over only three years (1987 - 1989) tells us a great deal about the rapidly improving quality of life there. As part of this achievement, Ceará was able to cut the number of infant deaths due to diarrhoea -- historically, the number one killer of young children -- by an astounding one-half. Serious child malnutrition was also cut by a remarkable one-third.

Reduction of infant and child mortality by one third by the year 2000 is the key overall goal set by the 1990 World Summit for Children. **If all of Latin America were to follow Ceará's example and reduce child mortality by a third over 'the 1990s -- accomplishing in ten years what Ceará did in three -- the lives of 1,250,000 children would be saved.**

Latin America and the world could also benefit from following Ceará's and Brazil's recent example in other ways, too. When the Convention on the Rights of the Child was still in draft form -- a year before it entered into international law -- Brazil adapted the draft and incorporated it into its new Constitution. Councils on the Defense of Children's Rights, with 50% public and 50% private sector participation, are being created at national, state and municipal levels. Over 1,500 Councils have already been created at the local level. A broad public-private sector alliance called Pact for Children is coordinating the effort on behalf of children. A year ago, under the auspices of this alliance, State Governors met and agreed to draft State and Municipal Programmes of Action to

implement the goals set at the World Summit for Children. To date 19 States have done so -- Ceará among them -- and many municipalities are following suit. It is exciting to witness such a decentralized process, with a broad cross-section of society collaborating at the local level, which is where needs and solutions must come together. Clearly, Ceará's example will serve as an inspiration to the rest of the country's States and municipalities.

I have been told that when you, Mr. Governor, learned that Ceará had won the Maurice Pate Award, you immediately committed yourself, in public, to yet another goal -- the elimination of neonatal tetanus in your State by the end of your tenure in office -- that is, by the end of 1994. Here, again, Ceará is ahead of the pack, setting the example. This goal has now been set for worldwide achievement by 1995, with the hope of saving 400,000 young lives lost each year to tetanus. We are certain Ceará will achieve this and other ambitious goals, and that the voters of Ceará will make sure that their next Governor -- no matter what political party he or she may be from -- will have no choice but to continue this noble work for children.

Many people who could not be here today also deserve recognition. A perfect example is Dr. Ana Maria Cavalcante, a fighter in the trenches for children's rights in the 1980s and now the Secretary of Health of the State of Ceará. We know she is at home commanding the war against a cholera outbreak, exemplifying the thousands of committed people who have made Ceará's achievements possible.

In closing, permit me to throw out a friendly challenge: can the people and government of Ceará make the kind of dramatic progress in the field of basic education that you have made in health and nutrition? Can you build on your successful early child development/pre-school initiatives? Ensuring access to basic learning for all children and, in particular, girls, is a universal challenge vital to human advancement in all spheres. Again, I am confident you can -- and will -- do it.

It is for all these accomplishments that the people and State of Ceará deserve international recognition -- and emulation. And so it is with deep emotion and a profound sense of admiration that I present you with the 1993 Maurice Pate Award. Thank you, Ceará, for reordering your priorities and showing that democracy and people-power can produce dramatic improvements, even where overall conditions are disadvantageous. And I would like you, Ms. Otaviana Alice Leite, to have these flowers, symbolic of the immense respect we have for you and your community health worker colleagues. Thank you.