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Statement by James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the close of the  
General Debate of the 1993 Executive Board

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FOR INFORMATION

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND  
Executive Board  
1993 session

Statement by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the close of the  
General Debate of the 1993 Executive Board

New York - 29 April 1993

Mr. Chairman,  
distinguished delegates, friends  
and colleagues:

In these first two days of General Debate at this Executive Board, two main threads run through the many and varied interventions. One is the sense that we are embarked together on an exciting enterprise to eliminate the worst manifestations of poverty in the world by the end of this century. As many delegations from developing countries have reported on the extraordinary progress they are making, despite all the obstacles and setbacks, one senses that there is a growing awareness that, perhaps to our own surprise, the community of nations might just be able to actually accomplish what we set out to do! Beginning with the goals set forth by this Board in April 1990, the common philosophical and practical framework provided by the World Summit for Children Declaration and Plan of Action, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was acknowledged, explicitly or implicitly, in virtually every intervention, giving this year's debate greater overall coherence and integrity than in past years.

\* re-issued to include extemporaneous text

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A second thread is an awareness of the need for striking a delicate balance among the multiple competing demands and priorities in addressing the needs of children. Ours is a world that has seen the end of the deadly military rivalry of superpowers ... a world that offers the prospect of devoting the resources and ingenuities of societies to promoting the welfare and dignity of humankind everywhere. And yet it is a world that is a daily witness to the horrors of former Yugoslavia as well as the persistent and quiet miseries on a much larger scale which afflict the majority of the world's people who are poor and vulnerable. A balance must be struck between the immediate and the urgent: between the loud and violent emergencies and the silent tragedies, with their mammoth waste of human potential ... between the international consensus expressed in global goals for children and development and the need for setting priorities in each country ... between expanding the reach of services to the needy and promoting capacities of people and institutions ... between the urgent needs of the newly independent states of Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the long-standing needs of other low-income developing countries ... and between coordination and consolidation of the UN system's development activities and maintaining the unique comparative advantages of UNICEF and each of our sister agencies.

I hear the speakers saying in different ways that the seemingly competing priorities must not be allowed to compete. They can be reconciled, and even synergies can be built, if children and their basic needs, immediate and long-term, are kept firmly in sight. As the distinguished representative of India reminded us: "It is the combination of hope and despair and opportunity and threat that make this last decade of our century so very important. Posterity will never forgive us if we fail."

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There is another theme which I wish I had heard, but did not hear sufficiently, concerning the need for increased resources. It is not just a question of loud versus silent emergencies. More is clearly needed for both. Obviously it is senseless to provide billions for peace-keeping and then not fully fund the much smaller amounts required for the provision of humanitarian assistance that peace-keeping is designed to enable. This is so amply demonstrated in Somalia and former Yugoslavia, where the billions are flowing for peace-keeping but the humanitarian assistance is being funded on an inadequate shoestring. It is equally irresponsible, as many of you have pointed out, to take from the silent emergencies to respond to the loud ones, since this in turn will contribute to more failed states, fewer democracies and slower reduction in the population explosion.

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Mr. Chairman, delegates, as you are aware we have chosen a new approach to responding to the comments and queries raised by delegations during the General Debate. Our efforts in the past to provide a complete and detailed response in my statement has resulted in recent years in a speech which far exceeded reasonable capacity for listening ... as well as for speaking, and for drafting! Accordingly, and in response to many suggestions by delegates following last year's missive, our different approach for this year is to produce that comprehensive inventory of responses as a printed document -- 36 single-spaced pages long -- which is appended to the text of this oral statement. At this time, I will offer a brief introductory comment addressing just a few of the key issues which were identified by delegations in their interventions.

I will first say that I was deeply moved by the many delegations which recognized the work of UNICEF staff in the field, and particularly those who have given their own lives in seeking to protect the lives of children. They are an extraordinary breed, and I am proud, like you, to be associated with them.

#### Convention on the Rights of the Child

Mr. Chairman, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is dramatically emerging as the common standard by which all nations can develop their overall attention to children. The rapidity and numbers with which States have embraced the Convention has been enthralling to the secretariat, as, I know, to all who devoted so many years to encouraging, drafting, and enacting this pioneering human rights instrument. The possibility that by 1995 -- the 50th anniversary of the United Nations -- it might well become the world's first "universal law", ratified by all States, is both a moving affirmation of the necessary centrality of the child in every society, and a daunting challenge to assist and encourage governments to incorporate its standards in all appropriate aspects of their national laws and policies.

#### Follow-up to the World Summit for Children

The most encouraging characteristic of the interventions during the debate are the reports from so many countries on the serious work now underway to "keep the promise" of the World Summit for Children. The majority of countries -- both within this Board and worldwide -- have now completed their National Programmes of Action or are close to doing so. Many of those which have not have explained the compelling reasons which have slowed their work, and we have heard their assurances to the Board of the seriousness of their commitment.

It is particularly encouraging that the NPAs are not merely inventories of actions to be taken, but are central points of reference for national policy on children and the family within overall plans for national development, and in many countries are being decentralized to provincial and municipal levels and -- very encouragingly -- are surviving changes of government administrations.

Further, it is clear that the identification of intermediate goals for achievement by 1995 will prove very useful to countries in marshalling their efforts and measuring their progress. This will fit well into the programme of the World Summit on Social Development in 1995, which should incorporate the mid-decade review called for by the World Summit for Children. In fact, in my judgement, the follow-up on the World Summit for Children could become the key ingredient in making the 1995 World Social Summit a meaningful and effective global summit.

It was also important to hear indications among industrialized countries that their concerns for follow-up to the World Summit are not limited to children in the developing countries. There is a new appreciation of weakness in some of their own national policies and programmes concerning children and the urgency of giving children a higher priority.

#### Resources for child and family development

Participants in the general debate reflected the same hopes, determination and concerns which I expressed in my opening statement to the Board on the potential and obstacles for providing the significant, but not impossible, resources required to achieve our goals for the year 2000. I particularly cited the formula first proposed by UNDP for a "20/20 vision": that developing countries should ensure that at least 20 per cent of their national budgets are addressed to priority social sector needs, and the donor countries should ensure that at least 20 per cent of their ODA should be similarly targeted. A number of developing countries indicated that they already exceed this standard in their social sector budgets. This is a welcome base, but I remind governments that the urgent concern is with meeting priority human needs, such as adequate food and nutrition, primary health care, basic education, clean water and safe sanitation, family planning, etc. It is these needs which require at least 20 per cent of resources.

There is much concern that some of our traditionally most exemplary donors have indicated that their national economic situations impose new restraints on their development assistance capacities. Several governments have already informed us of reductions in their contributions to UNICEF as well as in their overall assistance, rather than continuing their historic trends of steady growth and reliability in their support. We fervently appeal to these governments, as well as other donors, to "double- and triple-check" their budgetary resources in search of either new or re-directed funding for these priority human needs and to remember their pledge at the World Summit to give children a first call, in bad times as well as good. The sea changes in world affairs of the past several years surely suggest that many priority demands of the past should no longer be paramount, and especially in difficult times, there ought to be room for bringing the benefits of a new order to those most vulnerable and most in need.

At the same time, I do wish to acknowledge with heartfelt thanks that some of the donors in question still contribute on a per capita basis up to 20 times the DAC average. They and others compose a worthy band of committed states who have set a great standard to which all nations should aspire.

Using for illustrative purposes the assessment rate used for contributions to the UN budget, it is interesting to note that if all major donors contributed at or near their UN assessment rate, the declines in contributions from some of UNICEF's strongest contributors would be compensated for many times over.

I should also note, Mr. Chairman, that our five years' income projections for UNICEF, in our medium-term plan -- a 1.7 percent annual increase for the last four of those years -- are pessimistic and out of harmony with the consensus of this assembly that we are still on track for achieving the World Summit goals and the new ethic reflected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It can be argued that these projections assume a failure of 20/20 vision -- that the industrial world will not mobilize at all responsively to the promises and requirements of the World Summit for Children, and will not show for the silent emergencies the same responsibility which it is demonstrating for peace-keeping or, I might add, for economic recovery in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. UNICEF currently receives close to 10 per cent of ODA allocated for meeting priority human needs. If the world community were to shift the structure of its priorities to meet the 20 per cent of ODA target, and if only 5 per cent of this were to pass through UNICEF, this increase would represent a 40 per cent boost in UNICEF funding over the next several years -- vastly different obviously from the 1.7 percent that we project annually for the last four of the five years. Despite difficult economic

conditions afflicting so many countries, I hope that their governments will remember that those most in difficulty are the world's poor children. If they are "put off 'til a better tomorrow", there will not be a tomorrow for millions of them, and, as noted earlier, there will be more failed states, less democracy and a slowing of the decline in population growth.

Finally on the issue of resource mobilization, I appreciated the endorsement by several delegations to the suggestion that debt relief for Africa -- for human development, and especially for child development, purposes -- ought to be a principal topic for all industrial countries and on the agenda for the G-7 Summit of the seven strongest industrialized countries. The leading role which these countries play in defining the world's priorities makes it incumbent upon the G-7 -- all of whom participated in the World Summit for Children -- to take the lead in addressing human needs. The industrialized countries must find ways -- through restructuring of their budgets and through debt relief -- to support an effective assault on the most gross manifestations of poverty and neglect of children. When so much is clearly possible to be done, a failure to seize the opportunity and the challenge would be tragic. Demonstrable progress must be made soon in the industrial world's willingness to honour its promises of increased support to developing countries for their initiatives to "do the do-able" in response to the silent emergencies, or the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 risks a return to the rich-poor confrontations of the 1970s.

I take encouragement from one intervention that was not in the General Debate but in the Programme Committee on Wednesday morning. The United States said it believed that "a stronger alliance will be needed in the 1990s": it pledged its support for the principles of the Dakar Consensus; applauded the intermediate goals approved at ICAAC; and promised to be "a stronger partner in this more effective alliance". This is not lightly said, as it comes from possibly the most influential delegation the United States has ever sent to this Executive Board.

### Emergencies

There are many issues involved in the world's -- and UNICEF's -- response to emergency situations, but perhaps two stood out in the General Debate as demanding a global re-thinking and a common policy consensus. They are questions of balance -- both within the context of an emergency, and between the loud and the silent emergencies.

We have seen recent situations -- such as in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia -- in which the desperate conditions of the populace have been exacerbated -- if not instigated -- by the indifference and/or brutal arrogance of parties which have readily allowed the populace to be the primary victims of their hostilities...or, worse, have inflicted public suffering as a weapon. We welcome the new willingness of the international community -- selective and reticent as it may be -- to insist, on behalf of human morality, that people have a right to food and to protection from wanton abuse and to respond, where necessary, to such atrocities with force. But what is the balance between imposing that will and providing the needed humanitarian relief? As noted earlier, it is astounding that governments have readily committed billions of dollars to peacekeeping interventions to protect relief, but mobilization of the relief itself struggles and scrapes. Over one billion US dollars have been spent already in support of the military intervention in Somalia with more billions in prospect, while only some ten per cent has been contributed in response to the humanitarian appeal for US\$150 million in 1993. Something is wrong here.

The second issue of balance is, of course, not new to us, but it is surely made more vivid by the current proliferation and intensity of crises: it is in ensuring that resources to respond to the most immediate emergencies must not be taken at the expense of the on-going work on the silent emergencies, as so many of you insisted during the General Debate. Meeting the requirements of loud emergencies must be additional to the already too-minimal resources devoted to priority human needs in the developing countries. To reduce or defer attention to the urgent needs of the poor and vulnerable will only result, as noted earlier, in more civil conflicts, more collapsing infrastructures, more failed states, and more emergencies screaming for immediate attention at ever greater cost.

#### Family planning

Many delegations commented on the UNICEF policy paper on Family Planning, some of these comments coming with quite different emphases. I believe that the policy paper presented to the Board strikes the kind of balance suggested by a cross section of Board members. It allows and encourages UNICEF offices to be increasingly responsive to Family Planning in a manner that is complementary to support provided by UNFPA and other agencies, emphasizing comparative advantage and respecting local differences. It also emphasizes that success in advancing Family Planning goes far beyond just information, education, communication and access to



services. Success depends on progress in basic education, particularly of girls, and improvements in health that give families assurance that their first-born will survive. Progress on all three is necessary, preferably simultaneously, and we are seeing the synergy that results in country after country.

#### Donor evaluation of UNICEF

UNICEF staff at headquarters and in the subject field offices welcomed the opportunity to cooperate with the donor evaluation of UNICEF. We are grateful to the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark and Switzerland for undertaking this very useful and revealing exercise. There was strong agreement in the General Debate with the evaluation's identification of three primary strategies for UNICEF programming: service delivery, capacity building, and empowerment, while the view was also expressed that advocacy is either a fourth strategy or an overarching dimension to the first three.

The history of UNICEF's cooperation with developing countries demonstrates that service delivery has consistently been both a valued intervention in its own right, and often the key for our ability to assist in building capacity and empowering families and communities. Our Chairman commented on this following his visits to China and India.

I believe that, as many of you have urged, our programming should almost always reflect a merging of each of these three strategies in a balanced, coordinated strategy of cooperation. The nature of that balance, of course, must be determined at the country level.

I particularly welcomed the confirmation in the evaluation that UNICEF's advocacy on behalf of global goals as guides to national programming has reflected an appreciation that the goals must be adapted both "upwards" and "downwards" to fit the national situation, as determined by the government, and consistent with the government's own structures and capacities.

The nature of UNICEF's role in countries is an issue subject to differing perceptions. The evaluation cited UNICEF's roles as either a favoured partner or a critical partner in dialogue with governments. I would suggest that these roles are really two sides of the same coin of "concerned dialogue". UNICEF has built itself as a favoured partner to most governments through the effectiveness of our programme delivery and the validity and reliability of the experience which we share and the advice we offer. As a favoured partner, we are given greater liberty to be a critical partner: based upon the experience which we have

garnered over the years and from many countries, we are able to identify shortcomings and express our views. The duality of these roles is perhaps most vividly demonstrated in the country programming process, which begins with a critical assessment of the situation in the country, and proceeds with a respectful and honest dialogue on programme priorities. It is, I think, a mark of both our honesty and our discretion and sensitivity that governments welcome us as both favoured and critical partners.

#### Inter-agency coordination and UN restructuring

The very important process of UN reform which is now underway pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 47/199 was prompted by a sense of need for a more efficient and coordinated United Nations system for development cooperation. The secretariat shares this sense of need and strongly welcomes this effort. We have sought to strengthen collaboration at both the headquarters and country level, in incremental measures within our operational responsibility and in harmony with other development agencies and funds, respecting government's own priorities. This is especially pursued through the Joint Consultative Group on Policy. On larger issues, we await the guidance and mandates which will result from the General Assembly's consideration, and the Secretary-General's guidance on how to implement those mandates. And, of course, we are anxious to learn of decisions on changes in governance so that we may prepare to adapt our procedures to those changes.

At the same time, we appreciate the expressions in the General Debate that UNICEF's unique mandate and programme priorities should not vanish as a result of reform, and that the overall reforms and restructuring should maximize the comparative advantage and country-level accessibility of its various bodies and organizations while at the same time protect the flexibility and rapid response capacities of agencies such as UNICEF.

#### Guiding principles

Mr. Chairman, it now appears that I will not be with you next week. I have some medical problems that must be addressed. And if I may, I would like to make some brief comments in lieu of being here to make a final statement. Over my lifetime I have been guided by certain principles which I believe are very much those that have been underlying UNICEF's work. I noted in my opening statement the Arnold Toynbee quote: "Our age is the first generation since the dawn of history in which mankind dared to believe it practical to make the benefits of civilization available to the whole human race". Well, what UNICEF has been doing since

its new incarnation in 1950 is to see that this happens for children. And our year 2000 goals, if we achieve them, will really represent for children having crossed the watershed of insuring that every child in the world has a certain basic minimum equal start.

Second, morality does march with changing capacity, and capacity has certainly changed over these last decades. And as Primo Levi said: "If we can relieve torment and do not, we become tormentors ourselves". And, again, I think that UNICEF has represented a force for bringing to the attention of the world the need to move for children as our capacity has increased.

And then some of you will remember the quotation I used two years ago, the one from Henry David Thoreau: "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost -- that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them". In essence, that is what we have been doing with the Child Survival and Development Revolution since 1983. That is what we did in 1985 -- the year of the 40th anniversary of the UN -- when we called on the General Assembly of the United Nations to reach Universal Child Immunization by the 45th anniversary of the United Nations. And this is what we did in 1986, when we called upon all countries to complete General Assembly action on adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by 1989, the anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. That is what we did when we suggested the possibility of a World Summit and certainly, that is what is happening now as we are busily engaged in building foundations under the "castles in the sky" year 2000 goals of the World Summit for Children.

Fourth, I am very fond of a quotation from Jean Monnet, that great European, who when he faced a problem would say: "Let us not sit on opposite sides of the table with the problem between us. Let us sit on the same side of the table, put the problem on the other side, and solve it." And, in essence, that is what has characterized the work of this Board throughout its history. I think this has been unique among the UN agencies in our ability to follow-up on Monnet's advice. He also carried in his wallet a quotation from Ibn Saud: "For me, everything is a means -- even the obstacles." And that is what we tried to do when tragedy hit so many developing countries in the early 1980s -- use the means, the obstacles to force a rethinking on behalf of children. I think we are in the process of doing this again.

Universality of children's needs and societies' responsibilities

Mr. Chairman, let me end these remarks by repeating the words of Marian Wright Edelman, considered by many to be the foremost champion of children in the United States, who I believe speaks for this assembly and for children and adults all over the world:

"There are only 350 weeks from today until the turn of the century. I can think of no better way to mark the new millennium for our world to be able to see that the goal of meeting the essential human needs of every child, woman and man -- adequate food, clean water, sanitation, primary health care, family planning and basic education -- has been met...

Ms. Edelman continues:

"Each and every day, let us struggle personally and collectively to help our children regain their moral traction in a world plagued by ethnic, religious, racial and national strife... Let us together build the future peace by affirming though our lives and leadership and time and money and caring the promise and sanctity of each child.

"There can be no greater mission in life for any of us."

It is a mission which I know that every participant in this Board session embraces wholeheartedly. Let's get on with the work.