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Text of Video Message by James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to the  
Kiwanis International Convention

Nice, France  
30 June 1993



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TEXT OF VIDEO MESSAGE FROM  
MR. JAMES P. GRANT  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)  
TO THE  
KIWANIS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

NICE - 30 JUNE 1993

My name is James Grant and I am the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund. I had looked forward for many months to being with you in Nice today on the occasion of this very important Kiwanis International Convention. Just four weeks ago I had to have major surgery for the removal of a tumor, and my doctors have advised me I have to reduce my travel, but I am happy to say that I am now almost back to normal, and am doing my best to ensure that the promises made at the 1990 World Summit for Children can be kept.

My surgery was not for goitre - but it is interesting to note that even in some developed countries, a huge amount of money is spent each year on operations for goitre and thyroid tumours which could have been prevented by ensuring adequate iodine intake.

You have just seen the short video on Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD). Eliminating IDD was one of the goals made at the World Summit for Children. Virtually all of the world's leaders agreed that the continued existence of iodine deficiency was unacceptable, and that all possible efforts should be made to eliminate this problem well before the beginning of the next decade.

Kiwanis is an organization that since it's inception has taken a lead in mobilizing resources and public action to develop local communities, and has recently started its "Young Children - Priority One" campaign to ensure the development of young children. The single most important cause of impaired child mental development in the world today is a simple lack of iodine in the daily diet. We estimate that at least 1.3 million children are born each year with some degree of mental impairment due to iodine deficiency -- 120,000 of these children are so severely affected that they will never lead a normal life. All of this unnecessary suffering can be prevented by ensuring that everyone gets the tiny amount of iodine needed by the body every day.

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The video has explained the various ways in which this can be done. The best way of eliminating the problem in almost all developing countries is to do exactly what was done in the USA and Switzerland in the 1930s: put a little iodine in all salt consumed. The tiny additional cost of doing this can be added to the price of salt, ensuring that the program is sustainable in the long term.

To eliminate iodine deficiency disorders from the world just two things are necessary -- political will and the resources to get things going. The World Health Organization, the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders and UNICEF are helping to stimulate the necessary political will. KIWANIS International can make a very major contribution in ensuring that the necessary resources to put the political will into action - the equipment to iodise the salt, to check that it is properly iodised and support for communications to inform people about the importance of using iodised salt - are available.

Let us remember the vivid image of the young woman Maria in the video - the girl born to parents retarded by iodine deficiency, who had the chance to develop her full potential due to the control of iodine deficiency. You can imagine how the development of whole countries, plagued for centuries by iodine deficiency, will be boosted by ensuring that all children grow to be like Maria.

UNICEF looks forward to this historic opportunity of working with Kiwanis International to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders from all developing countries before the end of this century.

Only days after the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, let us proclaim that it is every child's right to develop to his or her full intellectual potential -- and that, therefore, it is every mother and child's right to receive the tiny amount of iodine needed to nurture that potential. UNICEF thanks you -- the children of the world thank you -- for helping to make this happen.