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Message from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation
on Achieving in Mid-Decade Goals for Children

Manila, The Philippines
27 September 1993



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President Ramos; Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen:

Regrettably, prior commitments related to the opening of the General Assembly in New York prevent me from being in Manila for this very important event. However, I did want to avail myself of the opportunity to express UNICEF's gratitude to President Ramos and the Government of the Philippines for hosting the world's first high-level regional meeting to discuss and coordinate efforts to reach the mid-decade goals for children. It is fitting that this gathering is taking place here, for under President Ramos' personal leadership a series of exemplary initiatives have been launched to radically improve the lives of his country's children.

I also wanted to emphasize that this consultation is unprecedented, and of strategic importance. Never before have governments gathered to map out plans that will so greatly benefit so many millions of children in so little time. If our goals are to be reached -- and we are confident they will -- it will require an acceleration of efforts in most of your countries, a spirited movement will have to be created at the national and local levels, and the active participation of all sectors of the population will have to be mobilized.

But, as you are aware, the rewards of success will be multiple and visible to all. By reaching the mid-decade goals, the world will not only be saving the lives of an additional two million children each and every year, but at the same time we will be giving economic development an important boost, population growth will slow, stress on the environment will be eased, democracy will be strengthened, and we will see improvements in the status of women.

Just by achieving one of the mid-decade targets -- universal iodization of salt -- you will be eliminating the leading cause of preventable intellectual underdevelopment in the world, thereby significantly improving school performance and labour productivity. By providing children with vitamin A through

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capsules or improved diets -- another mid-decade goal -- you will virtually eliminate the leading cause of blindness among children, while at the same time lower death rates by up to 30 per cent! By raising immunization levels to 80 per cent or higher in all countries and getting 80 per cent of all families to use oral rehydration therapy whenever their children get diarrhoea, you will drastically cut child mortality and disability. In only 27 months, and at a very low cost!

The third anniversary of the World Summit for Children is fast approaching. To commemorate that historic event, Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali will host a Roundtable on 30 September with the participation of leaders attending the General Assembly. We know that he plans to make an encouraging report on follow-up to the World Summit for Children, underscoring the importance of the National Programmes of Action issued by most governments, and highlighting efforts to reach the set of 1995 targets as a stepping-stone to achieve the full set of goals by the year 2000. I am certain that the achievements of the East Asia and Pacific countries will be recognized and that this Manila consultation will be cited as setting an example other regions should follow.

As you know, 1995 is the year of the UN's 50th anniversary. 1995 is also when the first World Summit for Social Development will be held. I cannot think of a better way to celebrate the UN's anniversary than by world leaders coming to the Social Summit with reports of progress for children, news that our targets have been reached! Your deliberations here in Manila, your joining forces and learning from one another, will help make this possible. Good luck in your consultation and thank you all for your courage and vision.