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Message from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
International Congress on Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning

Beijing, People's Republic of China
27 October 1993



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Message to the International Congress
on Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning
from

Mr. James. P. Grant

Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Beijing - 27 October 1993

Excellencies, esteemed participants and friends:

It gives me great pleasure to send you greetings at the opening of this important gathering. This Congress comes at a very appropriate point in time. Its major concern is the acceleration of efforts to achieve the 1995 mid-decade and year 2000 goals contained in the World Summit for Children Declaration and Plan of Action and in each nation's own National Programme of Action.

The joint sponsorship of this Congress by the Ministry of Public Health, the Chinese Medical Association and the Chinese Preventive Medicine Association, along with WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, indicates the high level of priority given to the topics to be covered, both domestically and internationally. We join our sister UN organizations in commending China for taking the leadership in convening this important meeting and opening it to participants worldwide.

Very little time remains for achievement of the ambitious but feasible World Summit for Children Declaration/National Plan of Action goals. If China and the world are to accelerate their efforts in this direction, clear milestones must be established to assure that progress is being made. It is to this end that UNICEF, in cooperation with WHO, has endorsed a number of "mid-decade goals" agreed upon by developing countries. Achieving these latter goals will assure nations that they are on the right track toward the even more challenging year 2000 goals. My colleagues from UNICEF will be spelling out the mid-decade goals in greater detail in their presentations at this Congress and will review global progress made in defining and implementing strategies to achieve these goals.

It is with special interest that I have noted that this Congress integrates the topics of MCH and Family Planning. Jointly with our sister agencies, WHO and UNFPA, UNICEF continues to emphasize the important two-way interaction and synergy between these two topics. Adequate child spacing and reduction of high risk pregnancies (too young, too old or too many) are major contributors to the reduction of maternal and child mortality,

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morbidity and malnutrition. Likewise, provision of effective services for women and children makes the control of fertility much more acceptable. Reduction of child mortality contributes to a rapid reduction in fertility rates when parents are confident their children will survive the early years and go on to enjoy access to basic education.

China has demonstrated remarkable foresight in making services for children and women, including family planning, important national priorities over the past 44 years. Current levels of mortality and achievements such as universal childhood immunization clearly document the effectiveness of China's programmes. Now more than ever, as the world prepares to make some of the most significant breakthroughs ever attempted in bettering the health and development of children, there is an urgent need for China's strong leadership and its demonstration that the World Summit for Children/National Plan of Action ambitious targets can be reached.

We in UNICEF hope that this Congress will help China assume such a leadership role, while providing a vision to all participants that what the world is attempting for its children is not only a worthy challenge but eminently "doable".

I wish you well in your deliberations.

Thank you.