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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
United Nations Pledging Conference on Development Activities

New York
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1 Mr. President, may I compliment you for the skillful way in which you have conducted this Pledging Conference, and give my thanks to the Bureau for its effective assistance. I would like to thank all those governments that have commented favorably on UN operational activities and UNICEF's work in particular. We trust that we can live up to your high expectations -- more than ever, we need your unwavering support.

2 The .. pledges made to UNICEF at this Conference total US \$... million or .. percent of the UNICEF Executive Board approved general resource level for 1994 of \$602 million. So far, this is an encouraging/somewhat disappointing ... percent increase over/decline compared to last year's income from the same donors. We are grateful for the pledges made, in particular for the increases announced by We are particularly grateful for pledges made by ... which had not been in a position to contribute last year.

3 The pledges to UNICEF made by our developing country partners should send a clear message to our major donors about the strong support UNICEF enjoys among recipient countries. Regrettably, most of our major donors consider themselves unable to make pledges to the operational activities of the UN and UNICEF at this point in time. Frankly, this compromises the planning environment for our long-standing partnership.

4 We are, of course, fully aware of the budgetary constraints that many donor governments are facing, particularly in view of increasing domestic pressures for improved social services and action against high levels of unemployment. At the same time, it is no secret that the need and the competition -- a word I had hoped I would not have to use -- for external assistance have grown in a number of areas -- the Newly Independent States and Central and Eastern Europe, the West Bank and Gaza (Palestine) and South Africa, are all in genuine need of generous support, and humanitar-

ian assistance, refugee and peace-keeping missions are absorbing an ever-increasing portion of donor budgets. But this support must not be at the expense of efforts to address what we in UNICEF call the "silent emergencies" of everyday illness, ignorance and malnutrition affecting the children of the world's one billion poor, the majority of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Much to our collective shame, 13 million of these children will die this year (as they did last year and will next year) -- a far greater toll than that taken by the many man-made and natural disasters we are witnessing in different parts of the world. And what is bitterly ironic is that while the world is spending many billions more to put out fires of armed conflict than it does on development, it is clear that greater attention to development and poverty would certainly help prevent many of those "fires" from breaking out, saving millions of lives and billions of dollars in the process. It has never been clearer that investing in development is an investment in a more peaceful and stable world.

5 Permit me to reiterate what the Secretary-General said in his recent note updating the UN perspective on the world economy in 1993: "The unprecedented number of low-income countries undertaking adjustment and reforming their economies, as well as expanding environmental and poverty eradication programmes, make necessary a much increased flow of Official Development Assistance. Indeed, such an increase is today one of the most critical issues on the multilateral agenda."

6 The Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children and the statements made by heads of state and government and senior envoys at the recent Round Table to commemorate the third anniversary of the World Summit for Children make it abundantly clear that the developing countries on the whole are working hard to fulfill the commitments they made to children. To date, 86 countries have issued National Programmes of Action mapping out their plans to improve children's lives by achieving a set of ambitious yet realistic health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and education goals by the year 2000. Many of them are reinforcing their determination to make measurable progress for children by embracing a package of mid-decade goals, to be achieved by 1995. Reaching those mid-decade goals would, by 1996, prevent 2 million child deaths per year and, among other advances, eliminate the main causes of preventable blindness and mental impairment among young children.

7 It takes considerable courage and determination to make such public commitments. It takes a willingness to change direction, to

reorder priorities and restructure budgets in the face of often considerable pressure to maintain the status quo. In one developing country after another we are seeing governments adopt innovative approaches to the delivery of basic services and mobilization of resources; they are embracing decentralized approaches involving grassroots communities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. As highlighted in the World Bank's 1993 World Development Report on "Investing in Health," they are employing some of the most cost-effective strategies for making rapid human progress. But in many countries, particularly the least developed and especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, the pursuit of domestic economic reform and human development priorities will require a sustained boost in foreign assistance targeted precisely to support those priorities. At this crucial point in time -- 2 years before mid-decade -- UNICEF appeals to the developed world as well as newly industrialized countries -- which face fewer obstacles to achieve their goals for children -- to stand by the commitments they made at the World Summit for Children and provide greater and better targeted assistance to children worldwide.

8 World leaders acknowledge the urgent need to do more for children. In President Clinton's first address to the UN General Assembly on 27 September this year he asked the assembled nations to join him to "make a new commitment to the world's children." He emphasized that doing "... more to get better vaccines and other treatments for curable diseases to children around the world ... is the best investment we'll ever make." A similar vision was articulated by Prime Minister Bruntland in her Rafael Salas Memorial Lecture on 28 September; she said that donors should allocate at least 20 percent of development aid "to helping the poor meet their needs for food, water, sanitation, health care, family planning and education for their children," for which the developing countries, in turn, should also allocate at least 20 percent of their budgets. At present, we believe that less than 10 percent of ODA and developing country budgets -- on average -- go to these human priority areas.

9 UNICEF wholeheartedly endorses these recommendations. Where fiscal constraints do not permit donor governments to immediately increase overall ODA levels, restructuring of current ODA budgets can easily produce the doubling -- on average -- of allocations going to the human priority needs Prime Minister Bruntland mentioned. This can -- this must -- be done in time to keep the Third World momentum I described going. But in the medium- to long-term, all donor nations should follow Norway's example and dedicate more than 0.7 percent of GNP to development.

10 In the current climate for ODA it is all the more pertinent that all donors -- bilateral, multilateral and NGOs alike -- re-evaluate their assistance patterns with a view to getting the highest return on investments in human development. In particular, there is a need to review the way technical assistance is provided, the terms of overseas scholarships, and the very concept of tied aid. Too often costly foreign experts are brought in where local expertise -- and even technology -- is available and should be nurtured. Many scholarship programmes do not address the needs of developing countries and end up fueling the "brain drain." And a recent OECD study shows that tying aid reduces its value by some 15-20 per cent for the recipient compared to aid that is untied. Many resources could be released for human development if these patterns were changed.

11 However, achieving more in the priority areas of human development is not just a matter of mobilizing greater resources. It will also require better identification and targeting of those in need. It will require more cost-effective and efficient approaches that stimulate community self-help. Better monitoring systems are needed to keep progress on track. These are areas where the UN system with its global network of expert agencies and field offices has a strong advantage.

12 Therefore, it is with some dismay that we have observed allocations to UN operational activities decline from 9 percent in 1984 to about 7 percent currently. And this is happening against a backdrop of increased need for concerted efforts in poverty alleviation.

13 At the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 18 October, the Secretary-General noted that "the United Nations regards international action against poverty as one of its noblest aims. Through the activities of UNICEF, UNDP and the UN High Commission for Refugees in particular but also of the Centre for Human Rights, the United Nations is making constant efforts to put an end to extreme poverty."

14 The intensified collaboration at the country level between the different branches of the UN system and the in-depth knowledge and experience which will be brought to bear on the formulation of the UN country strategy notes put the United Nations system at the cutting edge of poverty reduction.

15 The UN system remains the most important single source of grant financing for investment in human development. Its potential as a force for human development is only beginning to be tapped.

We urge your governments to strengthen their support for the UN's efforts on human development and poverty alleviation.

16 More and better targeted assistance to poverty alleviation is desperately needed, but it is only part of what is needed. At the same time, donors can pursue other routes to increased equity and well-being. For example, by expediting a balanced solution to the prolonged deadlock in the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations; by cancelling outstanding bilateral debt to debt-distressed, low-income countries, as has been proposed by Netherlands Minister for Development Mr. Jan Pronk; and by working with the international financial institutions to tackle the mounting multilateral debt problem, the donor community can prevent the further marginalization of the least developed countries, help them return to the rapid economic growth rates of the post-colonial years, and allow them to get the kind of spectacular results in economic and human development we are seeing in East Asia.

17 If we do not move decisively now on the several fronts I have mentioned, I fear that we will be missing out on one of those rare opportunities history affords us to make quantum leaps of human progress. The post-Cold War era -- for all its complexities, uncertainties and conflicts -- holds out the hope that true international cooperation can be mobilized to finish the great unfinished business of the 20th century: extending to every human being at least the basic benefits of modern civilization, science and medicine. I believe that the leaders of the world should come to the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March of 1995 and proclaim a series of decisive victories over some of poverty's worst manifestations and causes in the lives of young children. But if this is to happen, we need to start sprinting toward our goals now. We need to mobilize hope. We need to mobilize courageous and far-sighted leadership. We need to mobilize resources. Thank you for the pledges you have made today, and thank you for asking your capitals to do more, to do more soon, to do more for our children and the future of all humankind.