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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
to the  
Operational Activities of the UN System  
Second Committee of the General Assembly

New York  
10 November 1993



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This is my Fourteenth General Assembly as the Executive Director of UNICEF. We have, during that time, discussed and achieved many things together. During those years, I have always appreciated the opportunity to come before you and share with you UNICEF's perspectives. Yet, at no time during those years have I felt a greater need than I feel today to sound a call – an alarm of danger and a call of opportunity.

The dangers are readily apparent on the front pages of our newspapers. As many feared, the benefits of the resolution of the Cold War have often proven difficult to translate into tangible effects, and too often the benefits that have accrued are unevenly distributed. Of course, we also see the sudden eruption of problems long suppressed, previously held in place by yet larger difficulties.

For us who are devoted to development, these changes have meant the need to urge our societies to achieve several goals at the same time:

- We must sharpen and accelerate the effort to translate the capacities of the old era into the solutions of the new era. Public funds must be shifted from the military to human and developmental needs, but, above all, public energy must be remolded and refocused on a new set of challenges;
- We must find new ways and a new commitment to reaching those – largely the poorer countries and the poorer within countries – who would not otherwise be the first and most direct beneficiaries of the post-Cold War changes. Our world needs their potential contributions no less today than before, and we will be just as threatened if we do not unleash their capacities. If we fail to reach the poor, the islands of current prosperity will be battered by waves from all sides. The danger of failing to reach the poor may be less of a monolithic menace to common prosperity than the dangers of five years ago, but this danger is no less compelling;

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- As the pressure of threats like nuclear holocaust have been largely removed, we must deal with the sudden onslaught of underlying problems that festered for 45 years. From the "failed states" syndrome, to the legacy of massively disproportionate arms shipments, an unprecedented number of "loud" emergencies are upon us. We must address them, and yet do so in a way, as UNDP Administrator Gus Speth has said, that does not distract nor undermine our ability to address the underlying problems of development. And like the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, these new sudden eruptions show that problems suppressed will only grow and come to haunt us, if they are not addressed on a timely basis.

These new challenges share an important common denominator. They can only be addressed through concerted, conscious, sustained efforts that put forward a new sense of vision that mobilizes a large-scale international effort.

### **Common Goals and Strategies**

It is my conviction that the United Nations system can and must play a central development role if this new sense of vision – a new set of common goals and strategies – is to be developed. This Committee, and the UN organizations associated with it, can make an historic contribution to this effort. I will therefore turn to several specific ways in which we can move forward.

Over the years, the members of this Committee have helped develop an international consensus on a number of key development questions. You have struggled hard and produced important objectives for the International Development Strategy, for Agenda 21, for the Least Developed Countries, for the Declaration and the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children and in a number of other areas. UNICEF's experience with these strategies has shown that several elements must be present if they are to move beyond rhetoric to meaningful action:

- They must contain ambitious but achievable, specific objectives that emerge from country-level experience and commitment, objectives that all can understand;
- These objectives must be specified in the form of concrete targets, preferably quantified, to be achieved in a specific time-frame that can be monitored on a local, national and global basis;
- The targets must be supported by programmatic strategies for implementation; this is the place where the UN agencies have a particular, supportive role to play;

- Approval by the General Assembly is only a beginning. We must then have serious and highly capable mechanisms to provide international support to each country's efforts to achieve implementation;
- Finally, there must be specific mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing progress made and for providing the corrections needed to avoid slippage. This again is where the UN agencies have a crucial role.

All this is well illustrated by experience in implementing the commitments made during the World Summit for Children, which is documented in the Secretary-General's Report A/48/321 which you requested last year and which is before you under this agenda item.

The Secretary-General's Report provides you with information about successful action already under way in many countries and on a number of areas where I believe action by the international community is still needed. As you know, the 71 Heads of State or Government who attended the World Summit for Children have been joined by the vast majority of their peers, and a total of more than 150 Heads of State or Government have now signed the Declaration of the Summit. Even more importantly, over 140 countries, covering more than 90 per cent of the world's children, have prepared or are preparing National Programmes of Action to implement these commitments.

Similarly, this high-level commitment has been reaffirmed in a large number of global and regional fora ranging from the UNCED meeting in Rio to the OAU, SAARC, League of Arab States, Ibero-American, and Commonwealth Summits, along with many more regional and sub-regional meetings. In addition, there has been most heartening support from within the UN system, from bilateral aid donors and NGO partners. As the Secretary-General's Report makes clear, all of the key UN partners have been involved in supporting governments' implementation of their Summit commitments.

This high-level support and the highly mobilized involvement from a range of partners is most heartening to all of us. However, the essential point is that the implementation of the World Summit for Children has already begun to lead to dramatic progress for children in developing countries. Many of you are familiar with these accomplishments, and I will not dwell on them here. Millions of children's lives have already been saved, and countless more have been rescued from disability and a life of misery. However, what matters most is the vast potential still before us.

The process I have outlined has defined a series of "Mid-Decade Goals". Achieving these goals by 1995 will save the lives of an additional two million children each year. The Mid-Decade Goals include achieving 80 per cent immunization coverage, 90 per cent coverage for measles; eliminating neonatal tetanus, iodine deficiency disorders, and vitamin

A deficiency; eradicating polio and guinea worm disease; achieving 80 per cent usage of oral rehydration therapy; expanding the prevalence of breast-feeding; and securing universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These goals may sound ambitious, but they emerge from much national and international consultation. Most are chosen because they are feasible at a relatively reasonable cost and within a short time horizon. Moreover, the leaders of the developing and developed countries have chosen to commit themselves to these accomplishments by the end of next year. Turning that commitment into reality will require the support of all parts of the international community, and in your role as members of this Committee you can help provide that support.

As the Secretary-General's Report makes clear, the World Summit on Social Development will be examining many of these issues, and the success of that process may be a central factor in maintaining the progress for children. In future meetings the General Assembly will also be discussing the World Summit for Social Development. Obviously, the far-reaching goals of the World Summit for Children, and the positive experience to date, have implications for the upcoming World Summit. First, and perhaps most fundamental, we have the opportunity to turn the preparations for the World Social Summit into a process of concrete achievements at the country level. The next year and a half will provide a unique opportunity to re-double our efforts for those social goals which already have been approved, so that Member States arrive in Copenhagen both to report their achievements as well as to consecrate the next steps.

In a similar vein, I believe that practical experience has shown that the World Summit for Social Development can also develop into a mechanism for embarking on a new and yet broader set of concrete ambitious goals and strategies with an implementation mechanism that will help produce tangible results. On both of these points I look forward to providing my full support to Under-Secretary-General Desai in his very capable efforts.

#### **Resolution 47/199**

As Under-Secretary-General Desai has noted, this Committee has before it another important mechanism for supporting countries in their efforts to re-establish human and development objectives in the face of years of adjustment crises. Last year in Resolution 47/199 you created a new tool for Governments and the UN system: the Country Strategy Note. I am pleased to personally confirm the positive progress that has been reported to you in the background papers. A number of Governments have expressed interest in using this tool, and the UN country teams have had highly positive experiences in their own collective efforts. Many UNICEF Representatives from all regions have reported periodically to me on the progress under way in their country with the CSN – and on the

potential this has for providing focus for interagency collaboration. While results are still coming in, it is already clear that you have created a landmark mechanism that will make an invaluable difference to collaboration within the UN system and to Governments choosing to develop a Country Strategy Note.

As UNICEF is this year's Chairman of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), we are particularly conscious of the responsibilities we all have for the implementation of the path-breaking dimensions of 47/199. I understand that the Chairman of the JCGP, UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director (Programmes) will have an opportunity to provide an informal briefing to the members of this Committee, so I will not dwell on these issues in detail. However, I wish to underline to the Committee our sense that serious progress is being made. I also especially want to underline UNICEF's wholehearted commitment to the full and effective implementation of this resolution.

For example, as the reporting before you shows, we have canvassed our offices in almost all developing countries, exploring the opportunities to create common premises, and we are now developing a detailed review focusing on fifty or so countries. As a result, UNICEF and our partners will be submitting detailed proposals for moving offices to common premises to each of our governing bodies. Similarly, we have made progress in many areas of strengthening the Resident Coordinator system. Through the team-building and training exercises we are carrying out at the ILO Centre in Turin, Italy, through the increased frequency of regular country-level programme oriented meetings, through the increased use of joint elements in programme review exercises, and through a number of other techniques, we are truly seeing the development of a stronger and more effective Resident Coordinator system.

In short, 47/199 has given us the commitment and the capacity to create a unity of purpose, an effective and functioning system for the Resident Coordinator, and a true team approach at the country level in support of Governments. UNICEF is totally committed to achieving this new potential, and I am personally determined to keep this progress moving forward. But to do so, we need your continued support and your commitment not to waiver from the direction you have set forth. I urge you to use this General Assembly to help keep the UN system moving down the path of 47/199.

Before ending this presentation I would be remiss if I did not speak to one personal point. We have with us on the podium a new colleague – rather I should say an old colleague in a new role. Many of us have long admired Gus Speth in his previous roles, and I know that all of us are looking forward to working with him over the coming years. Already he has proven to be a very valued colleague for me, and I feel confident that under his leadership UNICEF and UNDP will break new paths of partnership. I believe that next year he and I will have many new common endeavours to report to you.