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Message from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
on the occasion of
The Inauguration of the Advocacy Committee
for the
Convention on the Rights of the Child in Japan

Tokyo, Japan
19 November 1993



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Mr. Sumita, President of the Japan Committee for UNICEF, Mr. Togo, Prof. Hatano and the representatives of the Advocacy Committee for the Convention of the Rights of the Child in Japan.

First, let me congratulate you on the occasion of the inauguration of the Advocacy Committee for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is my great pleasure to be able to address you on this very important occasion.

Two significant events have taken place in the world at the turn of the decade which have given rise to new hopes for a brighter future for the world's children.

The first event was the adoption of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**. In November 1989, the Convention was embraced by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the fruit of ten years of exhaustive consultations involving many governments, UN agencies and some 50 NGOs. Despite some skepticism that few governments would ratify the Convention, by September 1990 -- record time in the history of human rights treaties -- the Convention obtained the ratifications required for its entry into force as an international human rights instrument. Over the past four years, 153 countries have ratified the Convention making it the human rights treaty with the largest number of states parties. This rapid, widespread acceptance of the Convention leads us at UNICEF to hope for universal or near-universal ratification of the Convention by the end of 1995, which would make it the first truly global law of humankind.

The Convention recognized that each and every child has the right to develop physically, mentally and socially to their full potential, and to express opinions freely. But, it is more than that. This human rights convention for children is a blueprint for the health, survival and progress of human society as a whole. It

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articulates the universal truth that a nation's future is only as promising as its children and codifies standards for a truly caring society. While steadily moving toward the universal ratification of the Convention, we now have to ensure its full implementation: the survival, development and protection of all children.

The other milestone event was the **World Summit for Children** held in September 1990. The Summit brought together 159 nations, more than 70 of them represented by their Presidents and Prime Ministers. The world leaders who attended this historic children's summit agreed on a remarkable package of strategies and goals that represent what the world's leading experts and development agencies believe can be accomplished for children and women in this decade. Most of the targets are quantified and are to be reached by 1995 or the year 2000.

So when the States Parties to the Convention report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as periodically they must, they can report meaningfully in the critical areas of health, nutrition, and education, with special emphasis on empowering girls and women. More than 100 countries have now issued or drafted detailed National Programmes of Action to implement the commitments made at the World Summit. Thus the Convention on the Rights of the Child together with the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children constitute an ambitious but feasible agenda for improving the well-being of children to be achieved by decade's end. In country after country, a sense of mission and a campaign spirit are being generated around these plans.

Most of the countries in the world, particularly the developing countries, are beginning to accelerate progress for children. We must support their efforts and show that we are not indifferent to the plight of children living in poverty and undevelopment. Implementation of the Convention requires its application to all children of the world.

There are millions of children in the world who are being denied even the most basic rights to survival, denied proper nutrition, basic health care and education. This is precisely, the kind of injustice, the Convention was designed to prevent and remedy.

International cooperation is urgently needed to make the Convention work, as is stipulated in its Preamble. It is here that Japan can make a great contribution to the rest of the world, and to the future generations of humankind. Japan, one of the leading countries of the world in social as well as economic development, can mobilize more of its tremendous human, technical and economic resources to help developing countries stand on their own feet and help themselves.

Let us agree that ending the massive violation of children's rights, still taking place around the world today, is one of the central moral imperatives of our time. Let us agree, at a very minimum, that the rights of the 35,000 children who die daily of largely preventable malnutrition and disease, are every bit as precious and inalienable as our own. We can secure the rights of those who, in the words of Coleridge, will merely "die so slowly that none call it murder"; for it is now unquestionably a kind of murder, and we must secure their rights.

And the proposition I offer is this: using children as a cutting edge of human rights generally, and of our many ongoing efforts in diverse fields of development, would contribute more to international peace and security, and more to democracy, development and the environment, more to preventing crises and conflicts, in a shorter period of time and at a far lower cost than any other set of doable actions aimed at remedying global problems on the threshold of the 21st century. I know that this is a large claim, but I do not make it lightly.

In closing, let me reiterate to the Japanese people -- as well as those of the US, a number of Arab countries and several new Republics of the former Soviet Union that have not yet ratified the Convention -- that by taking prompt action to embrace this historic "Bill of Rights" for children, you can make it possible for the world to say, in 1995, that all humankind has decided, at long last, to put children first. The inauguration of the Advocacy Committee for the Convention on the Rights of the Child today will, no doubt, give an impetus to Japan's early ratification as well as promote understanding of its provisions among the Japanese people. I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation for this important initiative that you have taken for the benefit of the world's children.