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Notes

Includes WHO/UNICEF Common Goals for Health Development of Women and Children by the year 2000. [Copy provided by Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury for archives.]

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Number of images without cover

**EDWIN RAMIREZ**

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## Why a World Summit for Children?

"A review of the progress and potential of immunization, oral rehydration, antibiotics, breastfeeding, birth spacing, and strategies for improving nutritional health, shows that effective solutions to the most important causes of illness, malnutrition and death among the children of the 1990s are available and affordable today.

"UNICEF believes that they add up to a case for making the 1990s into a "Decade for Doing the Obvious". And it is in search of a commitment to do the obvious on a sufficient scale that UNICEF has proposed a Summit for Children. For it is the commitment of a nation's leaders, the awareness of a nation's people, and the mobilization of a nation's organized resources, which can put today's solutions into effect on the scale required."

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN, 1990

(to be published 12 December 1989)

## A Note on the Rationale behind the proposed World Summit for Children

UNICEF has proposed a World Summit for Children as a unique means for securing for children a level of consideration and protection essential to their survival and healthy development as the next generation of nations. The overall aim is to put children and their families high and firmly onto the agenda of the 1990s.

The need for that requires little elaboration. If present child mortality levels continue in the decade about to begin, some 150 million children will die before they reach their fifth birthday. Many times that number will not develop normally in mind or body because of frequent ill-health, persistent malnutrition, absence of basic community services, lack of early stimulation, illiteracy and lack of basic learning skills inherited from parent to child, and the absence of both challenge and opportunity within their lives. This deserves to be treated as one of the most important issues of the 1990s both because of the sheer scale of the human tragedy it entails and because of the fundamental disinvestment in development which it represents.

The new factor inviting dramatic action at this time, however, as the last years of the 1980s have demonstrated, is that the great majority of those children could now be protected at an affordable cost. But moving from "could" to "will" depends on a new order of awareness of the possibilities, and a correspondingly new commitment to do what can now be done.

No one seriously debates the importance of protecting the lives and health of children. But as so often happens at all levels of human affairs, the immediate has subverted the important. The illness and malnutrition of literally hundreds of millions of children, and the resulting deaths of approximately 40,000 each day, never seems to be considered an immediate issue. That is why any one major airplane crash in the decade of the 1990s will almost surely attract more attention than the deaths of 150 million young children as a consequence of gross poverty and under-development. And that is why it is sometimes necessary to consciously and seriously create a device for reasserting the priority of the important over the immediate.

Continuation of present trends and initiatives to protect the health of children could be expected to save the lives of possibly 25 million of those 150 million. A successful Summit could so improve the health of children as to double the lives saved to more than 50 million, and to reduce population growth as well as parents become confident that their first children will survive.

context of a Summit could these issues be presented in such a way as to begin to create the consensus that achieving certain basic goals through doing the easily do-able for the health, nutrition and education of children is a matter of national pride and a priority concern of national leaderships.

## 2. Galvanizing public support

To draw worldwide media attention to the problems and the potential of social mobilization to contribute to solving problems. Only the unprecedented nature of a Summit for Children could create the "magnitude of consciousness" which can lend immediacy to the undeniably important, and thus raise public awareness of today's new possibilities and how they could contribute to overcoming these problems through low-cost means such as use of oral rehydration therapy against the diarrhoeal dehydration still taking the lives of 7,000 children daily and the vaccination of children against six diseases still taking the lives of another 7,000 children daily.

UNICEF and its partners would of course spare no effort - before, during, and after the Summit - to encourage the widest possible awareness in all countries among the public at-large and especially among leadership constituencies in the media, business, medical and health communities, NGOs and community institutions, etc.

## 3. Summits at every level

To stimulate equivalent national and regional meetings of other leaders - religious leaders, business leaders, media leaders, leaders from the fields of education and health, from non-governmental organizations, from community organizations and women's movements, etc. - to consider the issues being raised at the Summit and to help mobilize the wide range of resources necessary - far beyond those of government alone - to give reality to a new priority for children in the 1990s.

This would take considerable effort on behalf of UNICEF and its partners in all countries. But a Summit meeting of world leaders would make it possible to stimulate hundreds - perhaps thousands - of regional, national, or local meetings and actions on the issues. In this way, the attempt would be made to generate a sense of world-wide participation in the Summit, making it not an isolated, stand-alone event but the indispensable centrepiece - the "critical mass" - of a much wider new involvement in the cause of children. Indeed, the Summit can give birth to a worldwide movement for children.

## 4. Convention on the Rights of the Child

To boost the new Convention on the Rights of the Child and to help establish it as the accepted minimum standard for all civilized nations. The Convention is likely to be adopted by the General Assembly in the closing days of the 1980s but, as is widely agreed, it will not begin to make a significant difference to the millions of children who are abused or exploited or neglected until politicians, press, and public in all countries become concerned about whether or not it is being observed. In the attempt to lodge

very young should have first call on society's concerns and capacities. The equally important extension of that principle is that children should be able to depend upon that commitment in good times and in bad. That principle, as relevant to the industrialized nations as it is to the developing world, is the subject of the opening chapter of the forthcoming 1990 State of the World's Children Report. In UNICEF's view, the establishment of that principle as a tenet of our common civilization could do more than anything else to change the story of what will happen to many millions of the world's children during the new decade and the new century which will follow. Such a change in the global ethic for children will not be easy to achieve. We believe that the espousal of that principle by the first-ever World Summit for Children could make a unique contribution to that essential task.

### How a World Summit links to real improvement in the lives of children

The idea of a "World Summit for Children" should not be perceived as only a two-day meeting of 41 or so leaders, but must be recognized as a total concept with many elements surrounding and being stimulated by the meeting itself - globally and within individual nations.

The following examples illustrate the mix of possibilities that would be developed and encouraged in relation to a Summit.

#### 1. National Plans of Action for the 1990s

Simultaneously with the issuing of invitations to the [41] invitees for the Summit, the Secretary-General of the United Nations should send a personal letter to the Head of State or Government of all States announcing the Summit and requesting that they initiate an exercise to (a) examine the situation of children in their country and prepare a National Plan of Action for the 1990s to close any gaps between present situation and the goals established in the Strategies for Children in the 1990s; and (b) to include in their examinations, and in the National Plans, anticipated new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with other countries and the international system in the common effort to achieve the 1990s goals for all children.

#### 2. Achievement of UCI-1990

Despite the progress made in raising immunization levels from some 10% in 1980 to nearly 70% in 1989, thereby saving the lives of some 6,000 children daily, approximately 7,000 die daily because of vaccine-preventable diseases. A Summit in late 1990 can be used as a compelling impetus for countries with lagging immunization programmes and weak infrastructures to strengthen and accelerate their efforts to achieve Universal Child Immunization by the end of 1990, so that the Head of State/Government will not be in the position of reporting "failure" when the Summit convenes.

- The opportunity to pledge specific participation in the Debt Relief for Social Investment scheme established by the Inter-American Development Bank in association with UNICEF, to allow indebted countries to apply scarce resources to child survival and community development needs.

#### 7. Enlistment of new constituencies for children

The Summit, unlike any other possible event, can be the stimulus for a vast array of consciousness-raising and commitment-motivating activities related to children, similar to the spontaneous impact of the International Year of the Child in 1979. Among possible examples:

- The World Council of Churches has decided to initiate a worldwide religious observance and mobilization in association with the Summit, calling for simultaneous "World Days of Prayer for Children" in churches, mosques, temples and synagogues in all countries which would include educational and motivational content.
- The United States National Commission on Infant Mortality plans a national convocation, relating to the Summit, in which it would invite Ministers of Health and other disciplines from other countries (developing and industrialized) to share their experiences and lessons with public health and political authorities in the United States as part of the Commission's efforts to provide leadership and guidance to U.S. states and communities on reducing infant mortality and morbidity.
- Heads of State/Government, governors and mayors will be encouraged to organize national, provincial and community "Summits for Children" - combining governmental authorities with leaders from business, the arts and popular culture, and political, social and religious movements, etc., in developing strategies to apply global and national goals at their respective levels.

#### 8. Enhancing the "broader context" of global affairs

The willingness - and political capacity - of governments to take unusual actions in behalf children should, in relation the Summit, be exploited to enhance the broader context of global affairs, making it easier for governments to find common ground and collaborative opportunities in other sectors and issue-areas. Examples of opportunities include:

- A Western Government and an East European Government might join together in pledging a joint research effort to produce one of the technologies suggested in point 5 above.
- The Summit could agree to a statement of principle regarding special assistance to children and families caught in conflict situations (eg, the "Days of Tranquility" in El Salvador and Lebanon and the "Corridors of Tranquility" for Operation Lifeline Sudan) which would enhance the moral force and thus facilitate the acceptance of such initiatives in future situations.

WHO/UNICEF COMMON GOALS FOR HEALTH DEVELOPMENT OF  
WOMEN AND CHILDREN BY THE YEAR 2000

The goals have been grouped under: Reduction of mortality, Women's education and health, Better nutrition, Control of childhood diseases and Control of the environment.

1. Reduction of mortality
  - 1.1 Reduction by 50 per cent of maternal mortality rates from 1980 levels.
  - 1.2 Reduction of 1980 infant mortality rates by at least half or to 50 per 1,000 live births, whichever achieves the greater reduction.
  - 1.3 Reduction of 1980 under-5 mortality rates by at least half or to 70 per 1,000 live births, whichever achieves the greater reduction.
2. Women's education and health
  - 2.1 Achievement of universal primary education and 80 per cent female literacy.\*
  - 2.2 Access by all couples to information and services for child spacing.
3. Better nutrition
  - 3.1 Reduction of the rate of low birth weight (2.5 kg) to less than 10 per cent.
  - 3.2 Enable all women to exclusively breast-feed their child for four to six months and to continue breast-feeding with complementary food well into the second year.
  - 3.3 Virtual elimination of severe malnutrition among under-5 children and reduction by half of moderate malnutrition.
  - 3.4 Virtual elimination of iodine deficiency disorders.
  - 3.5 Virtual elimination of the blindness and other consequences of vitamin A deficiency.
4. Control of childhood diseases
  - 4.1 Global eradication of polio.
  - 4.2 Elimination of neonatal tetanus by 1995.
  - 4.3 Reduction by 95 per cent in measles deaths and reduction by 90 per cent of measles cases in 1995, compared to pre-immunisation levels as a major step to the global eradication of measles in the longer run.
  - 4.4 Reduction by 70 per cent in the deaths due to diarrhoea in children under the age of five years; and 25 per cent reduction in the diarrhoea incidence rate.
  - 4.5 Reduction by 25 per cent in the deaths due to acute respiratory infections in children under five years.
5. Control of the environment
  - 5.1 Universal access to safe drinking water.
  - 5.2 Universal access to sanitary means of excreta disposal.
  - 5.3 Elimination of guinea-worm disease by 1995.
  - 5.4 Achievement of a safer and more sanitary environment, with significant reductions of radioactive, chemical and other microbiological pollutants.

\* Each country to define the age group.