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Remarks by Mr. James P. Grant  
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
at the  
Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women

Palais des Nations – Geneva, Switzerland  
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Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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Geneva, Palais Des Nations - 26 February 1992

On behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund, I warmly congratulate you and pledge our enthusiastic support for this Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women. We consider it to be both complementary to and supportive of the follow-up of the World Summit for Children, held a year and a half ago. At the World Summit for Children, which many of you attended, a majority of the world's most powerful leaders came together for the sole purpose of improving the lot of the most powerless. Seventy-one heads of state and government and senior representatives from another 88 countries -- from East and West, North and South -- agreed, for the first time, to give children a "first call" on society's resources. And they committed themselves to a Plan of Action to make this happen in every country by the year 2000.

By drawing attention to rural women in this unique forum, you are reinforcing the human-centred development strategy adopted by the World Summit for Children and hastening the process toward reaching the year 2000 goals for children and women.

I've always liked the Chinese saying: "Women hold up half the sky". But in the case of rural women, they clearly hold up more than half. On their backs falls the lion's share of food production, cooking, water-collecting, child-rearing and other family responsibilities that make up the fabric of everyday life. They are not only overwhelmingly poor, but their often inferior social and cultural status ensures that they receive significantly less than "half the sky" of scarce resources, services and benefits that reach the countryside. They go hungry so that their children may eat. They die prematurely by the hundreds of thousands: in pregnancy, childbirth, of preventable diseases. Because women are not effectively empowered to breast-feed, more than a million of their children died needlessly last year. A large majority of the world's one billion illiterates are women, and most of them are from the rural areas; a large majority of the more than 100 million children not in primary school are girls, most of them rural girls. More than one million girls die each year because they were born female. Up to 100 million women are missing because of the disease of discrimination.

If we want to get ahead of the problem of gender discrimination and poverty we have got to start with girls. We must also ensure that boys and men in the family and community play a constructive role in this search for equity and social justice. If this Geneva summit were to reaffirm a "first call" for rural girls in all programmes for the advancement of women, you will help revolutionize the pace, the scope and the relevance of development strategies in the 1990s.

The participants in the World Summit for Children committed themselves to "work to strengthen the role and status of women"...and they recognized that "efforts for the enhancement of women's status and their role in development must begin with the girl child". They stated that "girls must be given equal treatment and opportunities from the very beginning".

As part of the major goals for the 1990s, the leaders committed themselves and their governments to the following goals of particular relevance to women and the girl child:

- \* reduce maternal mortality by half;
- \* ensure universal access to primary education with special emphasis for girls and accelerated literacy programmes for women;
- \* give special attention to the health and nutrition of the female child and to pregnant and lactating women, with special attention to supporting women in breast-feeding for the first 4 to 6 months of a child's life;
- \* ensure access by all couples to information and services to prevent pregnancies that are too early, too closely spaced, too late or too many;
- \* ensure access by all pregnant women to pre-natal care, trained attendants during childbirth and referral facilities for high-risk pregnancies and obstetric emergencies;
- \* reduce iron deficiency anaemia in women by one-third; and
- \* promote increased food production and household food security.

When you return to your countries, I urge you to read or re-examine the National Programme of Action your government has prepared -- or is preparing -- to implement the year 2000 goals. If it does not adequately reflect the gender dimension and meet the needs of the girl child -- especially the rural girl child -- you, in your positions of prestige and respect, are well-positioned to help bring it in line with what's required. You could also help make sure that monitoring mechanisms provide gender-disaggregated data, so that we can more easily track and assess what's being done to both remedy and prevent the disadvantages girls and women suffer. This is an important way in which you can become effective advocates for girls.

In the next few months, I will ask UNICEF's country representatives to call on you to offer their assistance in this critical effort. Your continued leadership, your example, will help us shape a more humane, a more equitable and liveable world order...for women, for children, for us all.

# Year 2000 goals

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The following is the full list of goals, to be attained by the year 2000, which were adopted by the *World Summit for Children* on September 30 1990. After widespread consultation among governments and the agencies of the United Nations, these targets were considered to be feasible and financially affordable over the course of the decade ahead.

## Overall goals 1990-2000

- A one-third reduction in under-five death rates (or a reduction to below 70 per 1,000 live births whichever is less).
- A halving of maternal mortality rates.
- A halving of severe and moderate malnutrition among the world's under-fives.
- Safe water and sanitation for all families.
- Basic education for all children and completion of primary education by at least 80%.
- A halving of the adult illiteracy rate and the achievement of equal educational opportunity for males and females.
- Protection for the many millions of children in especially difficult circumstances and the acceptance and observance, in all countries, of the recently adopted Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, the 1990s should see rapidly growing acceptance of the idea of special protection for children in time of war.

## Protection for girls and women

- Family planning education and services to be made available to all couples to empower them to prevent unwanted pregnancies and births which are 'too many and too close' and to women who are 'too young or too old'.
- All women to have access to pre-natal care, a trained attendant during childbirth and referral for high-risk pregnancies and obstetric emergencies.
- Universal recognition of the special health and nutritional needs of females during early childhood, adolescence, pregnancy and lactation.

## Nutrition

- A reduction in the incidence of low birth weight (less than 2.5 kg.) to less than 10%.

- A one-third reduction in iron deficiency anaemia among women.
- Virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency disorders.
- All families to know the importance of supporting women in the task of exclusive breastfeeding for the first four to six months of a child's life and of meeting the special feeding needs of a young child through the vulnerable years.
- Growth monitoring and promotion to be institutionalized in all countries.
- Dissemination of knowledge to enable all families to ensure household food security.

## Child health

- The eradication of polio.
- The elimination of neonatal tetanus (by 1995).
- A 90% reduction in measles cases and a 95% reduction in measles deaths, compared to pre-immunization levels.
- Achievement and maintenance of at least 90% immunization coverage of one-year-old children and universal tetanus immunization for women in the child-bearing years.
- A halving of child deaths caused by diarrhoea and a 25% reduction in the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases.
- A one-third reduction in child deaths caused by acute respiratory infections.
- The elimination of guinea worm disease.

## Education

- In addition to the expansion of primary school education and its equivalents, today's essential knowledge and life skills could be put at the disposal of all families by mobilizing today's vastly increased communications capacity.