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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 1992 Danny Kaye International Children's Awards

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The 1992 Danny Kaye International Children's Awards

Welcome to the 5th annual Danny Kaye International Children's Awards. This lively and colourful event celebrates children -- their talents, their dreams, their ability to make us laugh and make us think. Fittingly, it memorializes childhood's great friend, Danny Kaye, who for 34 years served as UNICEF's Ambassador-at-Large. He travelled the globe as a particularly effective advocate for improving children's lives. With his funny faces and delightful songs, his hilarious imitations and impossible tales, Danny Kaye brought smiles to the saddest faces and awakened hope where hope was in short supply. In the palaces and offices of the powerful, and in the villages and slums of the powerless, he spoke the universal language of caring. He not only reminded the adult world of its responsibilities toward children, but showed us how much we grown-ups need the laughter and fantasy, the playfulness and innocence of children to stay healthy and sane -- as individuals and as a human collectivity. This event is a wonderful way of remembering Danny Kaye and furthering his work. It showcases the creative talents of young people and, at the same time, helps mobilize support for UNICEF-assisted programmes in the poorest countries.

Following up on the World Summit for Children, governments and communities are busy drafting plans and adjusting budgets to set in motion the strategies the world's leaders approved in September 1990 for radically improving children's lives by the year 2000. For the first time in history, the entire world is pursuing common goals for ending the mass malnutrition and disease -- almost all preventable or treatable -- that take the lives of 40 thousand children every day ... a quarter million every week ... 14 million every year. A new ethic is gradually taking hold, one that says it is unethical not to relieve such suffering when we have the knowledge, the technology and the resources for doing so. It is an ethic, moreover, that says children deserve a "first call" on society's resources, in bad times as well as in good times, in war as in peacetime.

There is a growing consensus that the end of the cold war and the upsurge of democracy in so much of the world provide us with a real "window of opportunity" for accelerating human progress, in which the swords of East-West confrontation can and must be beaten into ploughshares of economic and social

advancement for all. Starting by meeting the modest needs of children (first of all, girls, who are so often discriminated against) -- primary health care, basic education, safe water and sufficient food, in the context of supportive families and communities -- we can progressively move from addressing the symptoms to attacking the roots of poverty and underdevelopment, investing in a better and more prosperous future.

But the "window of opportunity" for progress is unlikely to stay open forever -- worldwide recession, debt crisis, ethnic and other forms of civil strife, widening disparities between rich and poor within as well as among nations, all threaten to slam it shut. To keep it open we need, now more than ever, a global people's movement for children and human development, one that holds leaders accountable for the promises they made to children in 1990 and works at every level and in every sector of society to reach the year 2000 goals for the young. Joining with other movements -- for peace and democracy, for saving the environment, for women's rights, etc. -- this movement for children would help ensure that a more meaningful world order takes the place of the unjust one that held sway over international life for the last half-century. This movement is already gaining momentum.

To the young performers in this programme I send my warmest greetings and congratulations. And our deepest gratitude to those who have made the 5th annual Danny Kaye International Children's Awards show possible. Thank you all for supporting UNICEF and its 120 country programmes that are helping people to help themselves. Together, we are building a movement to keep the promise.