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Interview with Ambassador Reyes\*  
Conducted in the Philippines by Laura Lopez-Lising  
6 June 1983

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\*Biography to be approved.

27 February, 1984 0217Q

Interview with Ambassador Reyes  
Conducted in the Philippines by Laura Lopez-Lising  
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As Board delegate

Lopez-Lising: Would you like to tell us something about the circumstances and duration of your appointment as representative to the Board?

Amb. Reyes: Well, I was appointed Representative to the Board as a member of the staff of the Philippine Mission to the United Nations. I covered the sessions of the UNICEF Executive Board as part of my regular duties as a staff member way back in 1948, when I joined the Mission in New York.

Lopez-Lising: How long were you on the Board?

Amb. Reyes: I was on the Board until I left the Mission in 1954. But subsequently I attended sessions of the Board. I was kept on as a representative, so I continued attending UNICEF Board meetings and became one of the old-timers on the Board.

Views on UNICEF

Lopez-Lising: How would you describe the attitude of the Philippine government towards UNICEF?

Amb. Reyes: Well, in the beginning, UNICEF was an almost exclusively emergency-oriented organization. From the early years the Philippines was interested in getting UNICEF to pay attention to the entire child - the needs of the child as a whole, not only to emergency requirements. This was for some time a continuing concern of the Philippines until UNICEF itself began to change from an emergency organization to a long-term agency concerned with the total needs of the child. This concerned the Philippines, which ultimately became part of the programme of UNICEF.

Lopez-Lising: What about your personal vision of UNICEF? Has there been an evolution in your view of the organization over the years that you were on the Board?

Amb. Reyes: My personal involvement with UNICEF started almost from the beginning of my term on the staff of the Philippine Mission to the United Nations. Actually, UNICEF influenced my decision to remain in the Philippine Foreign Service. When I joined the Foreign Service, I told my wife that we would probably stay in New York for a year and see what the United Nations was doing and then return to private life in Manila. I was not very keen on joining the government

service on a permanent basis, and I was rather skeptical of the United Nations, which seemed to be frustrated in pursuing its difficult goals.

Relation to personal career

But when I joined the Board, I began to see another side of the UN other than the political side, which was the frustrating and negative side. I began to see the possibilities of the United Nations doing a lot of good for people in the developing countries. And so I remained on in the Mission and eventually I became a career Foreign Service Officer. This was, I should say, largely due to my involvement with UNICEF and my view of the United Nations being changed on account of UNICEF.

Lopez-Lising: The Philippines was a member of the Board for many years. How decisive a role did the Philippine Delegation to the Board play in changing the Government's position on issues before the Board?

Amb. Reyes: Well, the Philippines was one of the "permanent" members of the UNICEF Board in the early years, and until recently it was highly regarded by the Administration, which encouraged the re-election of the Philippines to the Board every time its term was up. So eventually the Philippines became classified together with the major donors who were practically permanent members, although the Philippine contribution was not on the same level as these wealthier countries. That was an indication that the UNICEF Administration and the other members of the United Nations found the Philippine membership on the Board useful.

During my term as Permanent Representative to the United Nations I, of course, resumed my close involvement with UNICEF and was elected Chairman of the Board for two terms.

Pledging Conference

During my term on the Board we tried to make a contribution to UNICEF in these ways: we sought to regularize the method of contributions to UNICEF through the device of a pledging conference. At first there was some reluctance and apprehension about resorting to this method, and it was understood that we would try it on an experimental basis for one year. But then it proved to be successful and so it became a regular practice to include UNICEF among the United Nations agencies of the United Nations vitally concerned with development in the programme of pledging conferences. Since we were the authors of this idea, it was, I suppose, logical that I should preside over the first UNICEF pledging conference.

Staff upgrading

The other way in which we tried to help UNICEF was in upgrading its staff. Before I became Chairman of the Executive Board, I mistakenly thought that, in addition to the Executive Director, UNICEF had two Deputies at the level of Assistant-Secretary-General. I was quite shocked to discover that the Deputies were only Directors. It seemed to me that this placed UNICEF at a disadvantage in the inter-agency meetings of UN bodies concerned with development because the Deputies were frequently outranked by agencies that had Assistant Secretary-Generals but which were not actually handling operational programmes comparable to UNICEF. This was rectified through our representations and UNICEF began to have I think two, - first one and then another Deputy with the rank of Assistant-Secretary-General.

We also tried to upgrade the UNICEF field staff. I was not able to monitor the success of this particular effort.

Incidentally, if I may be allowed a personal reminiscence, I left the U.N. at the completion of my first term in 1955. Then I went on to Bangkok for two years and then on to Rangoon. All this time I was in correspondence with the Executive Director, who was then Maurice Pate. He wanted to get me on the staff of UNICEF. He was offering me a P-5 item at the higher levels, which meant that the income would be equivalent to a Director's income. But I thought the Deputies of UNICEF were Assistant-Secretaries-General, and if I would join the Board I should at least have a Director's rank. For instance, Adelaide Sinclair, my colleague, was on the Board and she had become a Deputy and I was holding out for this rank, not for the pay but for the rank of Director, thinking that I would be in the third level of the UNICEF staff. Of course, as time passed, I came to be promoted in my own service until it became impossible for me to join even at the Director's level. Many years later, when I became Chairman of the Board, I discovered that there was no Assistant-Secretary-General for UNICEF and that Adelaide Sinclair herself was only a Director. If I had known this in Rangoon, I might have joined with UNICEF staff instead of continuing in the Philippine Foreign Service because I was so attracted by the mission of UNICEF. It was the only UN organization that I seriously considered joining.

Philippine financial support

Lopez-Lising:

Well, perhaps it could be said that you contributed as much or more outside UNICEF as you would have in. Turning to another area, what is your view of the level of the Philippines' financial support to UNICEF? It started at a high level and remained the same for a number of years. There was no increase.

Amb. Reyes: Probably because it was a big increase when it was raised to that level. In the meantime, the recession has set in and the Philippines, like many other countries, has been experiencing fiscal problems, but actually the lack of an increase since this big contribution is not a reflection of Philippine lack of interest - it is probably just a financial difficulty that the Philippines has been experiencing.

Perception of UNICEF In Philippines

Lopez-Lising: How would you say that the various sectors of the Philippine public perceive UNICEF? Would you say there is a satisfactory understanding of and support for the work of UNICEF in the Philippines?

Amb. Reyes: Well, UNICEF is probably the best known UN agency and the name UNICEF has been popular with people in the developing countries since the inception of UNICEF. This is the reason the name has not been changed although it no longer corresponds to the present nature of UNICEF functions. The emergency function has been complemented by other functions, and I feel the name should remain the same because it has a certain popularity with the people. But I do believe that a lot of work has to be done to explain UNICEF to the people and to promote a deeper appreciation of what UNICEF is doing for the child. There is not nearly enough of this type of informational work being done.

Use of local media

Lopez-Lising: Is there something you feel UNICEF itself should do more of, or would there be more need to encourage and motivate national and local media?

Amb. Reyes: Yes, I think it should be a co-operative effort on the part of UNICEF and the local mass media. Maybe what should be done is to work through the local media rather than spend for direct UNICEF propaganda - propaganda in the good sense. A lot can be done on television for UNICEF. As you know, television is a voracious medium and there is a lot of telecast time filled with trash - inconsequential or insignificant programmes for lack of material. Now if local or national television stations could be provided with material and ideas by UNICEF, I am sure they would prefer to broadcast this type of material which would have some resonance among their audiences rather than the mindless fillers of time that they have resort to for sheer lack of good material. So maybe it could be a complementary effort. UNICEF's own Information Office could produce vital programs or ideas and suggestions that could be complemented by the efforts of national media.

UNICEF staff

Lopez-Lising: You had a close association with the first two Executive Directors, Mr. Pate and Mr. Labouisse, and you also had occasion to meet Mr. Grant. How would you assess the contributions of these Directors?

Pate

Amb. Reyes: Well, Maurice Pate was a missionary type and he looked like Mr. UNICEF - tall, white-haired, soft-spoken. He was a very impressive personality - the incarnation of the UNICEF spirit of going out and helping people, especially those suffering from emergencies. He projected this impression and he was also very dedicated. He established the tradition of UNICEF operating on the low-key side, trying to keep administrative costs to a minimum, with even the rank of UNICEF officials being on the modest side - that was the sort of leadership that Maurice Pate provided. In his own way, he was very effective: he could talk to heads of governments and to ministers. And because he had exuded this sense of dedication to his mission, he was very often successful in getting substantial commitments or contributions.

Labouisse

Harry Labouisse tried to continue this tradition. He was also a dedicated person although more, I should say, self-effacing than Maurice Pate and even more low-key in his personality, but he was very effective too and very devoted to the work of UNICEF. Now Harry Labouisse, of course, was Executive Director for a long time and he maintained the tradition. For instance, I had some difficulty in persuading him that he should try to upgrade the staff, not because he wanted to keep them downgraded but because of the innate modesty that characterized UNICEF operations generally. But, of course, in his own way, he looked after his staff and he cultivated a spirit of loyalty to the the UNICEF mission and was very successful in this type of leadership.

Grant

Jim Grant I know only casually. I met him in Mexico City during the special meeting on the occasion of the Year of the Child. He impressed me as an efficient person, typically American in his desire to get things done. Perhaps a different type of leadership is needed for a UNICEF that is growing, changing, becoming bigger and perhaps entering the computer age. Maybe Jim Grant is a computer-type leader in the good sense of being efficient, and the American get-up-and-go type who gets things done. That is my impression and I hope Jim doesn't take exception to this brief word portrait of his type of leadership.

Heyward

Lopez-Lising: What are your recollections of Mr. Heyward and Dr. Egger?

Amb. Reyes: Mr. Heyward was Mr. UNICEF in his own way. He was there almost from the beginning. He provided not only continuity but the solid groundwork required for Board meetings in order to answer many questions about the operation of UNICEF. Mr. Heyward was always ready. In his inimitable way he was a very modest person. He would sit there looking down at his papers, mumbling. If there were no microphones, you would probably not be able to hear what he was saying, but he was always talking sense. Moreover, he knew to the last cent the details of UNICEF operations. He was quite indispensable to both Maurice Pate and Harry Labouisse. You might say that the Executive Director, who has to deal with Heads of Governments, Ministers, was taking the high road and Dick Heyward was taking the low road, but both converged on doing something good for UNICEF.

Egger

Dr. Egger is a different personality from Mr. Heyward. He was more articulate, more outgoing and, I would like to say more flamboyant, but that doesn't fit the UNICEF picture. But he was almost laughing in his way of expressing himself. But he and Mr. Heyward were the two pillars of UNICEF - doing the essential groundwork and enabling the Executive Director to devote more time to policy matters and to worry about increasing the financial resources of UNICEF while Dr. Egger and Mr. Heyward provided the solid underpinning of administrative work.

Staff size

Lopez-Lising: What are your views of UNICEF staff in terms of size, calibre and national distribution of key posts?

Amb. Reyes: During the time of Maurice Pate and up to the time of Labouisse, UNICEF had a kind of pride in maintaining a rather small staff compared to other organizations. It was part of the UNICEF spirit of trying to make do with the smallest possible administrative cost. I am not sure it was always a good thing. Maybe in some cases efficiency suffered, but it was just part of the UNICEF tradition to try to do with a smaller staff than would be warranted by the total size of UNICEF operations. They did emphasize, especially among the field staff, this spirit of dedication which should be projected in dealing with the people that UNICEF was trying to help.

Executive Board

Lopez-Lising: What were your views of the Executive Board?

Amb. Reyes: For some time before I left the Board, we were trying to persuade the UNICEF Administration and key Board members to increase the membership of the Board to make it more representative of the enlarged membership of the United Nations. But being rather conservative, the Administration, under Harry Labouisse, the key members were reluctant to open up the Board to a larger membership, and for some time they resisted this.

Chinese membership

With regard to the representative character of the Board, I was also anxious at the time that I was Chairman and even afterwards to persuade China to rejoin the Board. It seemed to me that there would be something missing in the composition and deliberations of the Board if there were no representative of the People's Republic of China. When I left the United Nations and became Ambassador to Peking, I did my best to persuade the Chinese to rejoin UNICEF not only to make a contribution but more importantly to join the Board and contribute their considerable experience in childhood care and child welfare to the Board's deliberations. In China I discovered that one reason that they were not ready to rejoin the Board immediately was that the government agencies dealing with the work of UNICEF had been disrupted during the Cultural Revolution and were still being reconstituted. So they were not ready; they had no people prepared to take China's place on the Executive Board of UNICEF. Eventually they became members.

Comparison to other UN bodies

Lopez-Lising: How would you characterize the operations and work methods of the Board in comparison with those of other UN bodies?

Amb. Reyes: The work of the Executive Board reflected something of the spirit of UNICEF. There were no acrimonious discussions, no bitter arguments. Everybody tried to concentrate on what the Board could do for the needy children. In that sense the Board's deliberations were different from those of other U.N. bodies.

Politics

The Board tried to keep politics out. Incidentally, this was one of the reasons why the Administration and several key members of the Board were apprehensive about enlarging the membership of the Board. They were afraid that politics would be injected into discussions of the Board.

Donor/recipient relationship

- Lopez-Lising: So you might say that in comparison with other bodies the interaction between donor and recipient governments of the Board was perhaps better, and North-South relations on the Board were perhaps better than in other bodies?
- Amb. Reyes: I think so. I think that in a sense the Board could serve as a model. The countries of the North like the US, Sweden, Netherlands, UK, West Germany, Switzerland were quite generous. They tried to maintain substantial increases in their contributions to the work of UNICEF. And, as I noted, the discussions were devoid of bitterness and acrimony.
- Lopez-Lising: Were you satisfied with the numerical balance between the donor and recipient countries in the Board? Was this a major factor?
- Amb. Reyes: I think it was reasonable. During my time it was accepted as such by the representatives of the developing countries. It was recognized that the major donors should have adequate representation on the Board since they were sustaining the operations of UNICEF with their contributions.

Key delegations

- Lopez-Lising: Which delegate or delegations stand out in your mind as playing a key role as perhaps shaping Board visions?
- Amb. Reyes: Countries that continued to contribute almost out of proportion to their size included Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada - Canada has been a very active member - Switzerland and of course the United States. Among the developing countries, at least up to recently, the Philippines was a very active participant in UNICEF deliberations. India too. Australia also has been very effective on the Board during its term as a member. These are the countries that have been quite active and have made useful contributions over the years in shaping UNICEF policies and guiding its operations.

Policy evolution

- Lopez-Lising: Turning now to policy, what was your view of the evolution of UNICEF's policies and the impact of emerging development concepts on this evolution?
- Amb. Reyes: I think that UNICEF has kept pace with the developing countries' own changing perceptions about the child. As you know, the developing countries have themselves been realizing that children are a key factor in development. They are the manpower of the future. If you don't take care of the present generation of children, tomorrow you will have a deficient work force. Therefore it is important to provide the child with a good education, good nutrition and overall

care so that he grows up to be healthy, educated and able to carry on the work of development when he reaches maturity. Not only that, the child is entitled and should be enabled to grow in a good environment - not only the physical environment but the social conditions of the society in which he lives. This has led gradually to the consensus that aid to children should be, if possible, responsive to their total needs. This was the beginning of aid to out-of-school children, for instance, and similar types of assistance.

### Scope

Lopez-Lising: This ties in to a great extent with the next question I am going to pose which refers to your views on the scope of UNICEF's work, because in recent years more attention has been given to programme areas such as water supply and sanitation, urban services, childhood disabilities. What are your comments on this evolution of broadening its programme priorities?

Amb. Reyes As I said, these are responses to perceived needs. These changes did not take place in a vacuum. They are in response to the needs of developing countries.

### Water

Clean water, for instance, is really very basic. It is not something sophisticated or marginal. I would classify this type of UNICEF aid among the fundamental types of assistance. It sounds ironical, for instance, that in tropical places there seems to be a lot of water, but it is not always possible for villages in remote areas to obtain supplies of clean, safe water. This is quite an important UNICEF contribution.

Countries come forward with requests for assistance and they also make their needs known through the field offices of UNICEF. There is quite an interaction underlying these changes.

Lopez-Lising UNICEF has shown constant concern by responding with flexibility and effectiveness to changing development needs. What would you consider to be major milestones in UNICEF responses that spring to your mind?

Amb. Reyes I see no dramatic breakthrough, but rather a gradual broadening of UNICEF concerns.

### Emergencies

Lopez-Lising What are your views on UNICEF's performance in emergency relief and rehabilitation assistance for mothers and children, - the old traditional role?

Amb. Reyes This is still one of the things that UNICEF does best. It is usually first on the scene and its system of drawing from stocks that have been pre-portioned. In Europe UNICEF has a big storehouse for emergency requirements - for floods and other types of calamity. It is also quite flexible with its response, not only monetary but in the form of equipment that may be required. For instance, in certain places where communications are disrupted and only jeeps can go through, UNICEF somehow is able to provide jeeps. It is able to provide the type of assistance that other agencies are not equipped to provide.

#### Relations with agencies

Lopez-Lising What are your views on the evolution of UNICEF relations in co-operation with other UN agencies like WHO?

Amb. Reyes There has always been some strain and some tension in these relations because the specialized agencies like WHO, FAO and the others provide the technical components of aid and UNICEF provides the supplies - the food, the medicines, the transportation equipment needed and so on. Very often UNICEF gets impatient with the technical aid, and for their part these technical agencies sometimes tend to look down on UNICEF as just a supply organization. I suppose this is natural in that type of relationship, but the UN has been making special efforts at co-ordination amongst these agencies, and I think on the whole they get along well.

#### Fund-raising system

Lopez-Lising We referred earlier to the institution of pledging conferences for UNICEF. Would you like to comment in general on the adequacy of the UNICEF fund-raising system and the various ways it raises money?

Amb. Reyes UNICEF has a tradition of being resourceful, and I think the best known expression of this resourcefulness is the UNICEF greeting card institution, which raises substantial amounts of money. I think there is no contradiction between these efforts by UNICEF itself to reach people, to persuade them to make a contribution to UNICEF and the pledging conference which involve government commitments. As a matter of fact, I think it is a healthy thing for UNICEF to try to reach the ordinary people through greeting cards and trick or treat arrangements. It is one way of establishing a connection or a link between UNICEF and the people.

#### Decentralization

Lopez-Lising Would you care to comment on UNICEF's management style in depth? As a member of the Board you witnessed changes in management aimed at promoting decentralization and recasting the role of Regional Directors, among others. How do you view these changes and their impact on UNICEF?

Amb. Reyes            I think it was not much of a problem in the early years when UNICEF was a relatively small organization. But I suppose now that UNICEF is much bigger, this should be the subject of closer attention. But in the beginning, as I recall, the idea was to have just a few key people as Regional Directors with the rest of the field staff operating under the guidance of the few well-selected directors. They provided the field staff with the necessary guidance. There was a good deal of autonomy in the UNICEF style of management, as I recall. It was not too heavily centralized. I do not know if that has changed.

Major UNICEF achievements

Lopez-Lising        Based on your experience and knowledge of UNICEF, what would you consider to be its major successes and achievements?

Amb. Reyes            Well, I think UNICEF's major achievement would be the bringing home to the people, especially of the developing countries of the usefulness, the positive side of the United Nations, and in this way inculcating a sense of international community which is an important underpinning of all these efforts to bring about peace in the world. I think the worth of UNICEF can best be appreciated if you imagine the UN without UNICEF. There would be quite a big gap in the composition of the UN and a substantial reduction in its effectiveness and in its acceptability to the developing countries. Furthermore, the work of UNICEF, because it involves children and mothers, has drawn the developed countries who are interested in the work of UNICEF closer to the poorer countries. UNICEF has served as a kind of conscience of the world community, appealing to the generosity of the rich to help the poor. And this, in essence, is what we are trying to do in a more contentious context in the North-South dialogue. In the case of UNICEF it has been achieved. It is something that is already working.

Financial constraint

Lopez-Lising        What, in your view, have been the major constraints facing UNICEF and how successfully has UNICEF dealt with them?

Amb. Reyes            The major constraint, I think, is financial. This is the major constraint of the entire development co-operation effort under the auspices of the United Nations.

Overcoming political constraints Nigeria, Vietnam, Kampuchea

There is, to some extent, a political constraint, but this is minor in the case of UNICEF. It has not been a major factor in the work of UNICEF. Even countries ideologically at odds have less to quarrel about when they deal with the problems of Children. UNICEF has succeeded in overcoming some of these political constraints. For instance I think UNICEF was

involved in assistance to the children who were victims of the civil war in Nigeria, although it was quite a bitter conflict. And UNICEF has been first on the scene in assisting Vietnam and Kampuchea. It has been a lead agency in extending assistance to the needy children in this war-devastated country.

Mission: the child

Lopez-Lising      What do you consider to be UNICEF's major strength?

Amb. Reyes      UNICEF's major strength I think is inherent in its own mission which concerns children and mothers. They are just about the least controversial objects of assistance that you can think of.

Staff

The strength of UNICEF has been the dedication to its mission, which was fostered by the first Executive Director, Maurice Pate, and his successors. This has been a very great strength of UNICEF because it has been communicated by UNICEF's field staff to the people who have been recipients of UNICEF assistance.

Emergencies

UNICEF has a special character, partly due to the fact that in the early years it was dealing with emergencies, when the best aspects of people are usually challenged to manifest themselves in the form of compassion and in the form of sincere aid to the victims. UNICEF has done this.

International compassion

It has projected a genuine compassion across national and political frontiers. This has constituted a major strength on the part of UNICEF.

Lopez-Lising      Again from your experience, what would you consider to be the areas in UNICEF that most needed improving, whether it be policy perhaps or structure or management?

Amb. Reyes      I have not been in touch with the most recent changes in UNICEF policies, if there have been any. It is hard to fault UNICEF for lack of responsiveness because it has been widely responsive over the years to the needs of developing countries. Maybe if it had more resources, it would become even more effective. But, on the whole, I think it has been doing quite well.

Lopez-Lising      Is there anything you may like to add that I may not have covered that you would like say particularly?

Hope for future

Amb. Reyes

I would like to see UNICEF gain even greater popularity, greater acceptability in the countries where it has been working, and I would like to see UNICEF contributions increase to the point of enabling UNICEF to do an even better job in the field.

I would like to see the spirit of UNICEF pervade the entire United Nations so that we have emphasis on the positive side and the potential of the international co-operation instead of the dangerous political divisions that are now threatening the world with instability and even with the holocaust of a nuclear war.

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