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Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Closing of the 1990 Session of the UNICEF Executive Board

New York
27 April 1990



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UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
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Executive Director of the United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF)
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New York - 27 April 1990

Madam Chairman,
distinguished Members of the Board,
and colleagues:

In a few minutes, Madam Chairman, you will draw to a close this two week session in which we...government officials, experts, leaders from the private sector and international civil servants - "the clan" - have been working together intensively to help the children of the world. I am proud...and I am deeply grateful...to be a part of the team which is doing this work. But the close of this session, Madam Chairman, is hardly the close of our work together.

I am convinced that with hindsight this session will be recognized as a milestone for UNICEF in the last part of this century. Together, over the last 12 days, we have set the directions, the goals and the strategies, for UNICEF's programme of action for the next ten years, which could see more progress for children than any earlier decade. These build upon the foundation laid in response to a Board mandate in the 1980s which set in motion the acceleration of UNICEF activity for child survival and development,

with universal child immunization and oral rehydration therapy as the cutting edges. Our courage to set further goals for the 1990s has been reinforced by another major achievement which, in its turn, has also benefited from the progress of UCI and ORT: the world community's adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The confluence of these advances gives credibility for an historically unprecedented world-wide effort on behalf of children. They have instilled the confidence to move forward in defining, refining, and adopting our far-reaching goals and strategies for the 1990s.

Madam Chairman, at this final stage in our proceedings I do not want to return to specific programme issues. As we leave, I hope all of us will go forth to follow up with urgency and commitment that which we have here resolved together to do. There are specific actions which are within our powers, and I believe it is imperative that we act on them. We each have an agenda of child goals and concerns to carry forward in our own countries. We can each push to ensure that the goals of UCI in 1990 are achieved and sustained in our own country and community.

There is particular urgency to take action in Africa, the continent that has suffered most from the economic haemorrhage resulting from the interaction of the debt crisis, low prices for primary products, civil conflict, often abetted by the consequences of apartheid, and difficulties in management. Again, there are actions which we can take. For example, full support of the Bamako Initiative at this juncture is our strongest hope of meeting the injunction of this Board to reach and sustain universal child immunization, and to improve primary health care in general in Africa. I urge those who have been supporting successful efforts in Africa to sustain their assistance and for others to add to their help at this critical juncture. I must also add my voice to those who have felt the satisfaction of international triumph linked to the witnessing of the flag of Namibia being raised at the United Nations. We find it particularly fitting that this should be celebrated during our Board session.

The goals and strategies which this Board has adopted for UNICEF will, I believe, be turned to for guidance by a far broader community than this organization and its immediate allies. And it is fortunate that this is so. For while each of the goals, individually, is do-able, collectively they add up to the most ambitious effort for children ever undertaken. The challenge of the goals is to sustain what has been accomplished and to broaden the health actions into other areas such as ARI, AIDS and the reduction of incidence of measles, as well as into related sectors such as water and sanitation and achieving primary education for all.

The greatest challenge ahead is to transform these goals into actual achievements i.e., to the eradication of polio and guinea worm as well as to the reduction of under-5 and maternal mortality - saving some 50 million lives.

And this is precisely the context in which the World Summit for Children will be so crucial. The central thrust of the Summit is not so much on defining goals and strategies, which have already been agreed upon by government authorities and bodies of experts from around the world as well as by policy-making bodies such as this Board and the Executive Board of the

WHO. The central challenge is how to replicate in a score of priority areas in the 1990s the same kind of political leadership mobilization which achieved such dramatic results for a limited number of goals, most notably UCI, during the 1980s. This is the challenge of the Summit.

A second challenge for the Summit is to identify and encourage accelerated action in other fora on child-related issues whose solutions will help underpin the do-able goals. These issues encompass everything from the debt relief for child survival to the peace dividend and the environment.

Arising from these concerns which are brought into the limelight by the Summit is a challenge for all of us - governments, organizations and institutions - to restructure our own aid to give much more support to sectors which reflect the human dimensions of development - for example, to primary health care and to basic education.

Clearly much much more can now be done for the children of the world. The challenge is to discover means to firmly secure the position of children at the center of concern. Children should have the first call on society's concerns and capacities, for the essentials of their survival, protection and development, and they should be able to depend upon that commitment in bad times as well as good...in times of war as well as in times of peace...and in times of recession as well as in times of prosperity. We know it can be done when the will is present, as has been so conclusively demonstrated repeatedly in the past half of this century - in the U.K. in World War II when the health of children and pregnant women was better at the end of the war than at the beginning and more recently, from such examples as war-torn El Salvador and Maputo, where immunization levels of under-ones now tops those of even our host city of New York.

If more attention can be given to the human dimensions of development in other international fora and if practical action can be taken to achieve it, it will make a significant contribution, Madam Chairman. There will be several opportunities for this in the next few months, even before the World Summit. On May 24, UNDP will be issuing a pathbreaking report on "Human Development", and a month or two later the World Bank will be issuing its "World Development Report", with a special focus on poverty. I hope these will be used as occasions to reinforce a wider international focus on action for human development in the 1990s. But it is the Summit, at the end of September, which will provide an unprecedented opportunity for mobilizing action for the long overdue achievement of these human goals at the highest political level.

Madam Chairman, all of the great efforts on which we are embarking for the children of the world would mean little without the UNICEF staff who do the work of carrying out the directives of this Board. Indeed, were it not for the accomplishments of the able and dedicated women and men of UNICEF, we would have neither the expertise nor the solid foundation of experience to make possible the advances for children which the 1990s promise. Since this

Board last met in regular session, several members of our team whose work has brought child-related issues into a new esteem throughout the world, have stepped down, and within the next few months, others will be leaving.

While it is traditional to acknowledge here a few of those staff, it is never possible to adequately capture, in these few moments, their contribution.

Manou Assadi-Baiki, who many of you knew as the Director of the Division of Personnel for the last half of the 1980s, retired in December after almost 31 years with UNICEF. A national of Iran, Manou began his distinguished career as an Assistant Supply Officer in Teheran. He "worked his way up through the ranks", serving as a supply officer, then as programme officer, and eventually, in 1975, as Representative in Pakistan. He came to New York in 1977 as Deputy Director of Programme Division, and was named Director of the Division of Programme Field Services in 1982. We are very glad to say that while Manou has retired, he was pressed directly back into service to put his extensive programme experience to work in helping our field offices take full advantage of the World Summit.

Fritz Lherisson, whom we have been pleased to have with us at this Board session, will retire in July as Deputy Regional Director in Bogota. A national of Haiti, Fritz joined UNICEF as a Supply Officer in Brazzaville. He has served as Representative in both Vientiane and Kingston, Jamaica. Fritz holds the distinction of having worked, during his 26 years with UNICEF, on every continent where we have a programme presence, and never having worked in headquarters offices. Malcolm Kennedy, a national of New Zealand, retired in May after 20 years with UNICEF. He served in New Delhi and in Mogadiscio before his appointment as Representative in Kathmandu, a post which he held from 1979 until 1987, when he came to New York as Senior Advisor on the Environment. Jose Miranda, a national of the U.S.A., joined UNICEF in 1962 as a shipping clerk in the Supply Division at New York headquarters. He was serving as Chief of Supply Section in 1988 when he was due to retire, but he accepted a special assignment in Guatamala City, where he remained until his retirement in May. Enrique Marrero, also a national of the U.S.A., retired in January after 14 years with UNICEF's Supply Division. He served in New York, New Delhi and Dhaka.

Several staff members are scheduled to retire in the next few months, including Dickson Nkembo, our Senior Advisor for Social Mobilization in Nairobi, who will retire in June. Since joining UNICEF in 1978 from Tanzania, he has served as Representative in Lagos and Lusaka and as Chief of Africa Section in Programme Division in New York. The Office of Internal Audit is losing its Deputy Director this month with the retirement of Zamir Ahmed, a national of Pakistan. He has been in that office since his transfer in 1977 from UNITAR. Martin Beyer, who is currently on loan to UNDP, will leave us officially in October. Many of you know Martin, a national of Sweden, as the long-time Director of WET - an acronym he coined, which stands for Water and Environment Section. He has been with UNICEF since 1972.

Marie N'Gom Toure, who currently serves as Representative in Bangui, retires this month after 16 years - a career she began, I might add, after long successful service with the Government of Senegal, her home-country. Helen Masson, a national of the U.S.A., will retire in May as a Systems Analyst in New York after 11 years with UNICEF.

Sukker Aslam, who will retire in May as a Programme Officer in New York, joined the organization in 1975 in Kuala Lumpur. A national of Pakistan, she also served in Rangoon and Jakarta. Lloyd Clayton, a national of the U.S.A., has been with UNICEF for 32 years, and will retire next February as Programme Support and Administrative Officer in Lagos. Tran Phu, a national of Viet Nam, will retire in October as Chief of Personnel Services in New York. He has been with UNICEF for 26 years, having started as a Secretary in Bangkok. Per Grunth, a national of Denmark, will retire in May as a Systems Analyst in New York after 21 years with UNICEF. Jean McComb Campbell, a national of the U.S.A., will retire in June as a Senior Programme Officer in Khartoum. During her 18 years with UNICEF she has also served in Jakarta, Lagos and New York. Edward Kenny, a national of the U.S.A., joined UNICEF in 1961 as a Senior Shipping Clerk in the Supply Division in New York. Since then he has served as Chief of the Shipping Section in both New York and Copenhagen. In Copenhagen he has also held the post of Operations Manager. This year he has undertaken a 3-month assignment in Kabul.

Although we offer our farewells to these colleagues and friends - talented and dedicated workers for children - our true hope is that we can continue to count on each of them to share the wisdom of their experience in various supporting roles as new staff and volunteers join our ranks. It is far sadder when we must say farewell to friends and colleagues who have been laid to rest.

I refer to the death of Nancy Sadka in February. She had been with UNICEF for 12 years when she fell ill last summer. An Australian, Nancy had played a variety of important roles. She joined as a Programme Officer in the Programme Analysis and Evaluation Section in New York, following consultancy assignments with ESCAP in Bangkok and USAID and the World Bank in Washington. For five years she was in charge of Integrated Child Development Services in New Delhi, until she was transferred in 1987 back to Bangkok, where she was appointed Senior Programme Officer. Last August she was transferred to New York.

We must also record the tragic death of a colleague whose life ended not only while she was in service, but because of the service she was performing. Jena Hlass, a National Programme Assistant in Beirut, had worked with UNICEF for 11 years when, last December, she was dragged from her car and shot. Board Members will remember that Nabila Breir was killed in the same fashion in Beirut exactly two years earlier. May I ask that we all remember these two loyal staff members - and at the same time, recognize the courageous staff of our entire Beirut office who have, under the most able leadership of André Roberfroid, continued their work with exemplary determination. They continue to regularly cover almost every corner of Lebanon even in these times of conflict. On the 5th, 6th, and 7th of April, three vaccination days were

conducted throughout Lebanon following an appeal from UNICEF Beirut to all factions in conflict for a cease-fire. A total of 26,000 children were vaccinated, and another three-day cease-fire has been negotiated for May - raising very reasonable expectations that Lebanon will achieve UCI before the end of 1990. The Beirut staff are a rainbow of people from varying religious, cultural and political backgrounds, who share the common cause which we share with them: to help children.

Madam Chairman, as many Board Members are aware, a new staff award system has been instituted for outstanding services to UNICEF, as encouraged by the United Nations General Assembly. I am pleased to announce today that the first Staff Award will be presented to the team of the Beirut office - the entire staff.

Furthermore, Madam Chairman, I would ask that we pause for a moment of silence to pay tribute to our two heroines from the Beirut office, and to offer our most profound intentions that those who work so selflessly for the protection of children, especially in the most difficult of circumstances, might themselves be protected.

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Madam Chairman, at the close of the General Debate a week ago, I quoted Jean Monnet advising us not to sit on opposite sides of the table with the problem between us. This group has been willing to sit together, sharing our side of the table, ready to solve the problem across from us. And because we have, the wheels are set in motion for great advances for the world's children. The reinforcing synergism among the many great efforts in which we are participating: the goals and strategies for children for the 1990s, new commitment to education for all, progress toward ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the achievement this year of universal child immunization, and lastly, bringing the great promise to carry the others decisively forward - the World Summit for Children - signal an historic breakthrough for the children of the world. But perhaps most significant is the shift that these efforts indicate in how societies consider children. This is, I believe, a great advance...an advance for our civilization itself...and one which will benefit not only the children touched by programmes today, but children for generations to come.