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FOR INFORMATION

**STATEMENT BY CANON MOERMAN, PRESIDENT OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTEE ON UNICEF, AT THE
UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD SESSION**

Mr. Chairman,

As spokesman of the organizations working with UNICEF in the frame of the NGO Committee on UNICEF, I want to thank you for having given me the opportunity to join the other speakers in this opening session of the fortieth anniversary meeting of the Executive Board.

The NGOs are aware that a great deal of work has been accomplished for the children in those 40 years and they, too, congratulate, in turn, all those who deserve to be praised, from the most modest and unknown donors, field workers or office clerks, to the best known fund-raisers, senior officers or Board members. I do not want to repeat what has, or will be, said by others in more appropriate terms and with greater authority, but it seems to us that some of the general aspects of the results of the UNICEF activities can especially be stressed :

(a) Thanks to UNICEF, the child has been one of the main concerns of the whole United Nations system. This is strikingly different from what one can experience when going through the history of many governments.

(b) A network of child specialists is working all over the world with a globally planned strategy, adapted to circumstances, but stemming from a common main concern.

(c) Many attempts have been made (and some are still in the process) to reach a co-ordination between all child-related efforts, be they governmental, intergovernmental or non-governmental.

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To say it in one phrase: the NGOs are convinced that UNICEF has been the main contributor to change mankind's attitude towards childhood since the Second World War.

However, in spite of the celebration of the anniversary, the most important thing to be said today is that the future is more important than the past, that what still has to be done remains more important than all that has been done. In other words, child action, even today, remains an unfinished business. For this reason, "Action for children...unfinished business" has been chosen as the overall title for the Forum organized by the NGOs, in co-operation with the National Committees and with UNICEF itself.

The Forum this year, like the preceding ones, will hopefully offer a typical example of joint NGO activities in the framework of the relationship with UNICEF. The forums of NGOs are essentially future- and action-oriented and strive to analyse experiences about upcoming problems or new situations. May I here remind that the International Year of the Child (IYC) stemmed 100 per cent from a global NGO initiative and that the paper on "Children in especially difficult circumstances" (E/ICEF/1986/L.3), submitted to the present Board session, is the consequence of the deliberations of the 1984 NGO Forum. May I also point out that the interest recently shown by UNICEF in the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child is the result of steps made by the ad-hoc NGO group. In each of these cases, some governmental delegates, UNICEF officers or representatives of National Committees have, at the right moment, realized the importance of the action started by the NGOs and given their support to bring these initiatives to the attention of the Executive Board or the Executive Director.

Once again, this year, some delegates, UNICEF officers and representatives of National Committees are interested in the subjects dealt with by the Forum. You will all be able to attend the joint session, Wednesday afternoon, when the findings of the Forum will be communicated, since the Board session will be adjourned in order to make this joint meeting possible. But I sincerely hope that many of you will also be able to attend the meetings of the workshops this afternoon and tomorrow. I wish to recall to you the themes of these workshops: health issues, child exploitation, street children and children in emergencies (such as armed conflicts and/or natural disasters).

As far as street children are concerned, may I, as founder of an inter-NGO programme concerned with this issue, remind you that the NGOs have been pioneering in this field for years, and that UNICEF is surely the most appropriate body in the whole United Nations system to deal with it. Last but not least, I would like to point out that a new international organization, named "Childhope", has been created, only last week, to deal with the problem of street children. I am convinced it will be one of the major issues with which we shall have to cope in the coming decades. I sincerely hope that UNICEF will understand the necessity of co-operating with "Childhope" and supporting it.

UNICEF has often praised the NGOs for their co-operation and has recognized their specific and irreplaceable contribution to the work of UNICEF. Many statements along these lines were made in the immediate post-IYC period. The report of the Executive Board in 1981, recognizing the role of NGOs, states that "UNICEF was universally identified with the success of the Year...and that the momentum generated by IYC should be sustained under UNICEF leadership" (E/ICEF/673 p.48). It further recalls that UNICEF had been designated by the 1979 General Assembly to be the lead agency of the United Nations system for co-ordinating the follow-up of IYC. Further, it stresses the need to stimulate new initiatives and innovative approaches, as well as the co-operation with NGOs. Concerning NGOs' involvement and their co-operation with UNICEF, the document asserts that the challenge is to find ways to continue the unprecedented level of involvement through flexible, issue-oriented modes of collaboration.

This document and many others emphasize the need for UNICEF to develop a global interest in all child issues, to search for flexibility, innovation and action-oriented issues, and to work with NGOs. It is obvious that neither UNICEF nor the NGOs, even with their total resources, can be active in all child-related fields, at the same time. However, the NGOs, by fulfilling their own mandates, and sticking to their own goals and objectives, can be of immense help to UNICEF in carrying out its mandate. I think that one can consider the ~~NGOs' characteristics as being: multiplicity of aspects dealt with, pioneering function and flexibility.~~ I do not want to analyse those characteristics here, but only to indicate some aspects which are of immediate use to UNICEF:

(a) Thanks to the multiplicity of the objects dealt with, the NGOs cover nearly all of the child-related areas. They are unable to do all that has to be done, but they are able to inform UNICEF on matters for which it may develop programmes.

(b) Thanks to their pioneering function, the NGOs can alert UNICEF about upcoming new problems already present at the grass-roots level but not yet felt at governmental or intergovernmental level.

(c) Thanks to their flexibility, NGOs can rapidly adapt their actions and share with UNICEF the benefit of some recent innovative experiences.

In this way a joint action between UNICEF and NGOs can operate from a double approach: a more structured one from UNICEF, a more flexible one from NGOs' side.

I repeat, NGOs can render those services, not because they are auxiliary services of UNICEF but just by doing their proper job and keeping UNICEF informed about their work and by suggesting possible UNICEF involvement. We think that it would be normal for UNICEF to give to these NGOs the moral support they deserve. This does not require any new decision or resolution. We have enough texts, it is only a matter of implementing the texts already adopted.

All I have said up to now can at least partly be carried out through bilateral co-operation between UNICEF and individual NGOs. But many modalities of this co-operation, such as the organization of the Forum, need a joint NGO effort and a UNICEF contact with the official representatives of the NGO community. Hence, the necessity of an NGO Committee on UNICEF. Even if the relationship with a grouping of NGOs is more difficult than with individual NGOs, we have to keep that kind of relationship, and, therefore, that type of committee, if we want to avoid a general regrouping of child-related NGOs outside the framework of UNICEF. We can avoid this providing NGOs recognize that the committee, by its very nature, is UNICEF-oriented and providing UNICEF officers see in the committee a body composed of grown-up organizations enjoying, in their own way, a kind of sovereignty. Without such a spirit, UNICEF and NGOs will be deprived of what they can offer each other.

Monsieur le Président, Mesdames, Messieurs, tout cela suppose un esprit bien caractéristique, celui qui a jusqu'à présent toujours régi les rapports entre le FISE et les ONG. Il s'agit non seulement de le maintenir mais encore de le développer : un esprit de confiance réciproque. De la part des ONG un esprit de reconnaissance des possibilités spécifiques du FISE et de soutien aux priorités du FISE, ainsi qu'un esprit de solidarité avec les Comités Nationaux. De la part du FISE un intérêt pour l'ensemble des problèmes et des dimensions de l'enfant et la reconnaissance de la valeur de certaines idées nouvelles comme de la qualité de certaines actions même développées à une échelle modeste. Il faut que de sessions, comme celle qui s'ouvre aujourd'hui, ne sortent pas seulement des résolutions, mais aussi un souffle d'espoir pour les enfants et d'encouragement pour tous ceux qui oeuvrent à leur bien-être physique, moral et spirituel.
