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Comments by Dr. Gabrielle Wuelker  
on Mr. H. R. Labouisse,  
UNICEF Headquarters, 24th March 1986

In 1970 I became the vice president of the German National Committee, and on 1 March 1977, I succeeded Countess Waldersee as chairman of the German National Committee. Beginning with my attendance at my first Executive Board session in Geneva in 1971, I was deeply impressed by the calibre of Mr. Labouisse and also by his staff, such as Mr. Heyward, Dr. Egger and Mr. Charnow. As a sociologist at a German University, I was particularly impressed by the strategies and by methods of UNICEF when meeting the needs and interests of children and their families and its contribution to the fight against poverty. These have been most helpful to me in my studies and my work in development aid.

I had often heard that UNICEF was a unique organization and I found it certainly deserved that term. I got to understand the specific ways UNICEF worked, under the leadership of Mr. Labouisse, for the people and with the people -- the way they mobilized the target groups for cooperation. The staff of UNICEF did not offer methods of self-help until they had found how the people themselves applied and practiced self-help.

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Another aspect which I highly appreciate was the cooperation of UNICEF with the government and the national and local authorities. From my own experience I know that quite often experts in the field prefer to work on their own without the assistance of the governments. When working with the government, as UNICEF does, two goals are met, the objectives of UNICEF and the needs and wishes of the local population.

I believe that one of UNICEF's important strengths is that it gives material help, advice, and support for training and education, rather than primarily cash. Money can go ways that can never be traced. If people are convinced of the value of a programme aided the UNICEF way, they work much harder at it than would be the case if the assistance was in cash.

From my own experience in the field in both Africa and Asia, I learned that projects for the poorer groups have a special need for leaders -- personalities not with technical expertise, but with a capability of becoming a guide and a force to inspire others. This aspect is of high importance in my opinion. Therefore I was glad to learn from Mr. Labouisse the emphasis he placed on UNICEF's work to get local people inspired and trained in new methods. Local people if they are capable of convincing their fellow countrymen are far better educators than the foreign experts can ever be. Local leading personalities will continue what they have learnt from the foreign experts.

My delegation was always very pleased when it learned of hundreds and thousands of people living in the villages and in the slums who managed to become participants in socio-economic changes by learning simple things which we think are just quite normal, such as achieving having better hygiene. Much change can be achieved even in a very small neighbourhood, and it can be an example.

When the German National Committee had it's 25th birthday Mr. and Mrs. Labouisse came to us and Mr. Labouisse made a wonderful speech on the strategies and programmes of UNICEF. It was most convincing to the German audience. Mr. Labouisse took the time to spend several hours with 80 representatives of our 5000 voluntary workers who sell the greeting cards and who spread out the messages and information on UNICEF to our public. He gave a very inspiring picture of how UNICEF works in remote areas and in difficult conditions. Many of the leading personalities in the Secretariat had years of experience in the field, in the bush, in the slums. They had gotten to know first-hand what the needs in those areas.

In talking about Lebanon, Mr. Labouisse emphasized that UNICEF was not bound to political or to ideological principles. The UNICEF staff was working in Lebanon under Dr. Remy's guidance at this time reaching all the various factors. Mr. Labouisse himself had been there. When he was asked whether this wasn't very dangerous, he replied, "What I am demanding from my field officers I have to share myself." And he had joined Dr. Remy when they had to pass through all the fighting groups although gun fire sometimes hit the car or jeep of Dr. Remy. This was typical of Mr. Labouisse.

For the many decades I have followed the politics and policies of development aid. I got to know many national or bilateral organizations I got to know many outstanding personalities. Two personalities that have impressed me most was Paul Hoffmann and Mr. Labouisse. Both of them had a deep charisma. Both of them were convinced that the most difficult and biggest task which mankind has to face in the second half of this century is the cooperation of different nationalities, different cultural and ethnic groups all over the world.

Mr. Labouisse has convinced me personally that UNICEF, due to its human impact is a unique organization. It really tends to follow the best strategies, to understand and to give a leading and helping hand to those who had not yet participated in all the ways they can to make life easier for themselves, their children and others.