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Press Release ICEF/9
18 December 1989

UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETS IN SPECIAL SESSION TO CONSIDER SECRETARIAT SUPPORT FOR WORLD SUMMIT FOR CHILDREN

(The following release is being issued as received from New York)

The Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) met this morning in special session to consider the request that UNICEF provide secretariat support for the World Summit for Children.

The World Summit for Children was called for by the Heads of State or Government of Canada, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Sweden at a meeting held at Geneva on 12 and 13 November 1989 and has been proposed for 26 and 27 September 1990 at United Nations Headquarters. In a statement of agreement issued by the six initiating Governments, the aim of the Summit would be to "stimulate new initiatives in all countries and, among the international community, to address those issues that most critically affect children for the decades ahead".

Speaking on behalf of the six Governments this morning, Yves Fortier (Canada) presented a report on how they had reached their decision, so that the Board might endorse the project. He stressed that the Summit should not be an expensive extravaganza, but "a sober, result-oriented function", so that the budget of UNICEF would not suffer. He added that the Summit would not be a UNICEF Summit. It was initiated by six countries and would be, in the final analysis, the responsibility of the initiators.

Responding to the Six, James P. Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, said that the year 1990 was an opportune moment for a new and stronger commitment to children. "This may well be the most important moment which we in UNICEF have experienced, since that moment when the nations of the world agreed, albeit reluctantly, that healing the wounds of children affected by the Second World War wasn't the end of responsibility for children but merely the beginning", he said. The Summit offered an opportunity to secure for children a new and solid place high on the agenda of nations, he told the Board.

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initiators decided. In order to do that and to attract as many world leaders as possible, they decided that it would be best to hold the Summit in New York or Geneva. Canada pledged \$250,000 towards the realization of the project; five other world leaders joined, following Canada's commitment. The initiators decided that this was an idea whose time had come and decided to proceed with exploratory talks with Mr. Grant.

Since September, exploratory talks had been held, moving the idea from a concept to a statement of agreement on a World Summit for Children. The purpose of the Summit was deserving of attention, they concluded. The initiators asked many questions, cross-examined Mr. Grant and his colleagues, and concluded that the proposal should be endorsed by UNICEF. That was the reason that the Board of UNICEF was meeting today, he said.

Ultimately, the six initiators would be responsible for the Summit, but the initiators would seek a larger group of planners, he said. It was crucial that the planning committee have a budget which was fair and reasonable. They also met with the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for funding, so that the budget of UNICEF would not suffer. "We cannot afford a Summit that would be the focus of finger pointing by Non-Government Organizations who would say why are they spending millions of dollars on a Summit whereas it could have been better spent on children," he stressed.

They suggested the 26 and 27 of September, 1990, the first week of the general debate of the 45th General Assembly, for the Summit. Those dates had been criticized, he said. The planners were willing to consider the criticism at a meeting in January. The date was still flexible, he added.

Invitations extended this week could be extended into a process which might be too hurried, he warned members of the Board.

Canada was pleased to call this proposal to the attention to the Board of UNICEF for its endorsement. The purpose was for the survival and protection of children, stressing problems children face in the area of education, housing, and health, among other concerns. Children in many developing countries faced serious problems, yet many children in developed countries also lived in poverty. He mentioned the United States and Canada as countries where many children live in poverty.

"We are firmly convinced that the time for a Summit is now," he said, as he called for a reporting system through the Executive Board of UNICEF, in order to use the expertise of UNICEF in the area of children's concerns. But the Summit would not be a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Summit. It was initiated by six countries and would be first, and in the final analysis, the responsibility of the initiators.

Executive Director's Response

Responding to the six initiators, Mr. Grant said that the idea of a Summit for Children was not a new one. Some 20 heads of state had already

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presented an "unprecedented opportunity to mobilize all sectors of society for the improved survival, protection and development of children."

He said he was appreciative that the initiators had chosen to associate the meeting so closely with the United Nations, so that the international system could be strengthened. Not only would the Summit attract a much greater number of Heads of State or Government to participate in the General Assembly than usual, but the two sessions were surely complementary to one another. That, of course, would make for a fitting and productive working celebration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.

Thus, he said, he intended to express his belief to his successor, as President of the Assembly, that all necessary steps be taken to ensure that the Summit took place in optimal conditions. The work of the Summit should be co-ordinated with the General Assembly. They should reinforce each other, with some of the leaders who were attending the Summit also participating in the General Assembly.

DRAGOSLAV PEJIC (Yugoslavia), speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the Co-ordinating Bureau of Non-Aligned Countries, said that he agreed with the assessment that civilization and progress must be measured by the extent to which it acts when faced with human suffering. Child survival and development were among the major issues at the Ninth Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement. Those countries had expressed their extreme concern over the tragic waste of millions of children's lives as a consequence of poverty, lack of proper health care, poor sanitation and nutrition and the deterioration of economic conditions.

Because of that, he said the Non-Aligned fully supported the holding of the World Summit for Children as a constructive way to mobilize national and international efforts to address a common challenge. His own Government also supported the initiative. He hoped that the Summit would succeed in bringing attention, and promote commitment at the highest national and international political level, to goals and strategies for ensuring the survival, protection and development of children. He also believed that the Summit would provide strong impetus to the promotion and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

LISBET PALME (Sweden) said that a Summit for children would help ensure the necessary commitment of political leaders to place children's issues high on the political agenda in the future. It would contribute to raising awareness of existing possibilities to improve child survival and development, and it would promote the ratification and implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

She said that the Summit should not be an isolated event. It must be part of — and a catalyst to — a continuous process for the benefit of children. It was directly linked to UNICEF's mandate, but it also went beyond UNICEF's scope. Therefore, it was appropriate to hold the Summit in a United Nations framework. It was furthermore important to take advantage of the experience of UNICEF and other parts of the United Nations system.

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the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a blueprint for minimally acceptable standards for the development and protection of children, would gather dust, she warned.

Her delegation supported the proposals which would enable UNICEF to use the Summit for mobilizing communities and assisting governments. She suggested that 5 to 10 per cent of resources invested in military activities be diverted to programmes for children.

JORGE MONTANO (Mexico) said that the six initiators of the Summit endorsed the idea so that all States could work for children's health. Political interest had been demonstrated by many States in Latin America and the Caribbean. "We feel that children should not merely survive, but that their future should be assured," he said. The initiators believed that the Summit would help States to mobilize their resources on behalf of children from many economic and social backgrounds.

Through the adoption of the Convention of the Right of the Child, the international community had already shown support for children. The six countries hoped that they might draw on the expertise of the Board and of other countries in planning for this Summit. He warned that it was advisable to guard against excessive costs lest the convenors of the Summit be legitimately criticized. He called for a Summit date that might ensure participation by Heads of State. The Board's discussion should reflect the importance of the event so that it might be given priority by members of the international community, he concluded.

NANA S. SUTRESNA (Indonesia) said that a World Summit for Children would provide an impetus for greater involvement of all nations in putting the concerns of children as core priority of social development. As countries faced the difficulties of economic development, the needs of children should not be neglected. Those children were the future of those nations. In fact, they were the future of the world.

He said that, in the event a Head of State or Government participated in the Summit, ample time should be given to deliver whatever comments he or she wished to make. However, recognizing the limits of time, those countries represented by dignitaries other than the Head of State should have their statement distributed and not read. With regard to the proposed budget, he supported the view that the budget for the Summit should be shouldered by voluntary contributions. In calculating the estimated budget, special emphasis should be given to: extending the contribution to all 131 UNICEF Member countries; welcoming the voluntary contribution of all; and using those voluntary contributions effectively to support the two day summit activities.

HUGO NAVAJAS-MOGRO (Bolivia) said that the President of Bolivia had pledged the backing of the Government for the holding of the Summit. The protection of children was a noble cause. At a time when exciting possibilities were opening up in United Nations activities, the Summit gave new stature to the work of UNICEF. It could not fail to have the emphatic support of the community of nations.

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China had the world's largest population of children, he said, and his Government had attached great and consistent importance to the question of children. Despite relatively low socio-economic development, tremendous efforts had been made to promote the well-being of children. China was ready to share that experience with other countries and work together with them to search for solutions to the pressing concerns of the world's children. The Summit would provide China with an opportunity to do that. He supported the idea and would actively participate in the preparatory work.

FRANK MAJOR (Netherlands) said that he welcomed the interesting and timely initiative. Children embodied the future of the planet and were the best investment one could make in the common future. He believed UNICEF should act as a co-ordinator for the proposed Summit. Further, the final declaration must be of significant substance if it were to contribute to a change in the situation of children for the better.

The themes of the Summit had not yet been made clear, he said, and it would be best to discuss specific issues, rather than discuss items that had already been broadly implemented, such as immunization. New issues that needed attention should be advanced. Some themes that could be discussed were: the situation of girls; family planning; the importance of the position of women; children and AIDS; children and drugs; and children and war.

He said each country should decide at which level it wished to be represented. The UNICEF should not prescribe the level of representation. Further, he thought more information on mobilization activities was necessary. Concerning budget estimates for the Summit, it should be reformulated on the basis of expected income. No funds should be committed except on the basis of assured income.

STANISLAW PAWLAK (Poland) said his delegation hoped that the Summit would give new impetus to the Convention on the Right of the Child. His delegation felt that ratification of the Convention should precede the date for the Summit. Poland was also concerned about the date for the Summit because so many important international meetings and different summits were planned for next year.

His delegation supported the Executive Director's recommendation that UNICEF provide secretariat assistance for the preparation of the Summit, as well as pay advance expenditures from its general resources until donors contribute on a voluntary basis to special accounts. He called for the Executive Board of UNICEF, at its February meeting, to review the proposed budget for the Summit on the basis of detailed examination by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ).

His delegation also recommended that policy decisions on those important matters be made at a regular meeting of the Executive Board.

PAUL LEMERLE (France) said France had always been at the forefront in protecting the rights of children, and he supported the idea of the Summit. However, the Summit was an important event that required careful preparation, and he regretted the haste with which the UNICEF Secretariat had approached

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CHRISTOPHER KATSIGAZI (Uganda) said his delegation welcomed the idea of the Summit as they welcomed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The delegation felt that a Summit would create a positive and stimulating environment for the protection of children and hoped to see participation by member States at the highest levels.

He stressed maternal and child nutrition, water and sanitation, basic education, and immunization among other concerns for discussion at the Summit. Those were among issues to be addressed by Uganda in its five-year plan for the period 1991-1995. He suggested that the Summit stress national efforts and capacities in those areas.

His delegation reserved comments on the budget for the Summit but would address that matter at the meeting of the Committee for Administration and Finance.

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