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UNICEF Board continues discussion of arrangements for World Summit on Children (1989: 20 December)

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United Nations

Press Release

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UNICEF Executive Board
1990 organizational session
11th Meeting (AM)

ICEF/1701
20 December 1989

UNICEF BOARD CONTINUES DISCUSSION OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORLD SUMMIT ON CHILDREN

The Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) decided this morning that if an agreement could not be reached by tomorrow, 21 December, on the arrangements for a proposed World Summit on Children, it would suspend the special session until early in 1990.

In a separate meeting following the special session, the Board elected the Fund's representatives to the Joint Committee on Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF.

During the special session the Board has been considering proposals that UNICEF provide secretariat support, funding and venue for a Summit meeting. In addition to budget estimates prepared by the Secretariat for action by the Board's Committee on Administration and Finance, the Board is considering three alternate proposals covering various aspects of arrangements for the Summit meeting.

The six countries which had originally proposed convening the Summit -- Canada, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Sweden -- had proposed that the Summit's preparatory and meeting costs be financed by voluntary contributions and that the UNICEF Executive Director be authorized to spend up to \$1.5 million for the event. Barbados had proposed a budget ceiling of \$2,944,615. In a third proposal, Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom had called on UNICEF to provide secretariat support for the Summit and had recommended the establishment of an open-ended working group to set an agenda for the proposed Summit.

During discussion this morning, the representative of Canada, on behalf of the six initiating countries, proposed that in the face of an impasse on the resolutions, the Board suspend negotiations and reconvene in January. The matter of contention was the role that the United Nations and UNICEF would play in a Summit meeting. The representative of Japan suggested that it would be worthwhile to continue meeting in order to arrive at a budget ceiling for the Summit and for related activities.

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Most members of the Board spoke in support of the need for the Summit. Many agreed that September of 1990, the same time that the General Assembly met, would be an appropriate period for such a meeting. They were interested in choosing a time that would attract Heads of State, top government officials and maximum press coverage.

Speakers on arrangements for the Summit included the Netherlands, Barbados, Egypt, Liberia (on behalf of the African Group), Zimbabwe, Yugoslavia, Cameroon, Indonesia, Uganda, Bangladesh, the United States, China, Mexico, Thailand, Pakistan, Denmark, the Sudan, Sweden and Ecuador.

During the continuation of the Board's 1989/1990 organizational session, the Board elected UNICEF's representatives to the recently established Joint Committee on Education of UNICEF and UNESCO. Without a vote, the Board decided that its Chairman, Margarita Dieguez (Mexico), and the Chairman of its Programme Committee, Frank Majoor (Netherlands), would serve ex-officio on the Joint Committee. Also elected to that body were Banjong Choosakulchart (Thailand), Yvette le Quellec (France), Dame Nita Barrow (Barbados) and Gabriel Fernandez (Liberia). Stanislaw Trepczynski (Poland) and Teresa Garuba (Nigeria) were chosen as alternates.

The Executive Board of UNICEF will meet again at a time to be announced.

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Board Work Programme

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Board met this morning to continue considering a request that UNICEF supply a secretariat for a World Summit on Children. The Summit is tentatively planned for September 1990 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The UNICEF Committee on Administration and Finance met in closed session yesterday to consider a request for secretariat support for the Summit made by the Governments of Canada, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Sweden.

The basic plan for the Summit is detailed in document E/ICEF/1989/15, which contains a statement of agreement by the six initiating Governments and the response by the Executive Director of UNICEF to their initiative. The statement of agreement contains the purpose, date and venue, a draft agenda and information on financial contributions already pledged to finance the Summit, as well as background information in support of the initiative. The Executive Board of UNICEF is being asked to approve a provisional budget of \$1,912,376 and a second budget estimated at \$2,944,615 for mobilizing activities in preparation for the World Summit.

Discussion of Proposals

The Chairman of the Board, MARGARITA DIEGUEZ (Mexico), said that she had been informed by the sponsors of various proposals that negotiations among them must continue.

YVES FORTIER (Canada), speaking on behalf of the six initiators of the proposed Summit, said that after extensive consultations, fundamental differences had not been resolved. The initiators had agreed that a World Summit was a worthwhile undertaking, that participation in planning should be open to a large number of nations, and that UNICEF should provide secretariat support. They also had agreed that a suitable date should be discussed.

There had been no agreement, however, on a meeting at the highest level possible that would attract attention to the plight of children. Mr. Fortier stressed that a "summit initiative associated with the United Nations must be a United Nations meeting". The six initiating countries, he said, wanted the Summit "attended by presidents, prime ministers and heads of State". The initiators had said in their statement of agreement that they wanted to keep the Executive Board of UNICEF involved in the preparation of the Summit and wanted the Board to review the proposal. But, Mr. Fortier added, "we do not wish the Summit to become yet another special project of the United Nations or UNICEF".

The six initiators were encouraged by the support they had received and would continue to work for the world's children. "If our initiative is lost, it is the children of the world who will be the losers", he concluded.

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FRANK A.M. MAJOOR (Netherlands) said that after working with the co-sponsors of the various proposals, he saw possibilities for reaching eventual agreement on preparations for a Summit. Delegations were open to imaginative new solutions and shared the commitment to the convening of such a conference. It was up to the Board to act on proposals concerning preparations for the meeting -- not to make it a United Nations Summit. He believed a Summit could be convened by the Secretary-General at the proposal of the six initiators, but that the Board should play a key role in preparations and substantive proposals for consideration at a Summit.

An open-ended planning committee with a steering committee composed of the six initiators could be established for the purpose of submitting proposals to the Board. While the six initiators had indicated their commitment to the convening of a Summit, the Executive Board bore the responsibility for providing the necessary support for the initiative. His delegation stood ready to participate in whatever further negotiations were required.

Dame RUTH NITA BARROW (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean countries, supported the proposal of the six initiators that a World Summit for Children be convened. She believed that the statements which had been made this morning had not been mutually exclusive. She appealed to all parties to come to an agreement and to be as flexible as possible so that preparations for the conference could go ahead.

MOHAMED NOMAN GALAL (Egypt) said that, in joining the consensus on the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child during the present session of the Assembly, many delegations had held back their reservations on a number of issues. He supported the views expressed by Barbados. While the Executive Board should have a say on the convening of a Summit, the question was whether it should have the final say. His delegation found it difficult to go ahead with a Summit-level initiative which did not stand a chance of success. He had witnessed some special sessions and summit meetings, in which there had not been full participation at the level desired. He called on the Board not to expand the agenda for the proposed Summit and not to broaden the issues to be considered at the meeting.

SYLVESTER JARRETT (Liberia), speaking on behalf of the African Group members of the Executive Board (Benin, Cameroon, Egypt, Liberia, Nigeria, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Sao Tome and Principe, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe), said that following consultations on the proposed Summit for children those delegations had agreed on a number of points.

The African members believed that the convening of such a Summit, which had been endorsed by African leaders on a number of occasions, would generate interest in and contribute to the achievement of child survival and development. Those members therefore supported the view that invitations should be extended to Heads of State and Government in order to enhance a Summit's importance. African members favoured convening the Summit as early as possible, preferably from 26 to 27 September 1990, during the General Assembly's next regular session.

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Preparation for the Summit should be undertaken by a planning committee which would be constituted, taking into account the need for equitable geographic distribution, and which would work in close consultation with the Executive Board. In order for preparatory work to commence at the earliest, the Board should set the minimum commitment at \$700,000 for the Summit itself and \$1 million for mobilization activities. The African Group agreed with the procedure outlined by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for avoiding delay in start-up activities. When the Committee considered the matter at its meeting next month, the African Group would propose a ceiling of \$1.5 million for the Summit and \$2.5 million for mobilization activities, with the understanding that that position did not constitute approval of the proposed budget by the African members.

CHIPO ZINDOGA (Zimbabwe) stressed the importance of convening a summit meeting rather than a conference. She supported the proposal submitted by the six initiators.

MIRA NIKOLIC (Yugoslavia) fully supported the proposal by the six initiators that Heads of State and Government be invited to take part in the Summit. She did not oppose the idea of enlarging the Planning Committee to a reasonable number, but stressed the importance of efficiency in the work of such a Committee. She supported the proposal to limit advance spending to \$700,000 for the conference itself and \$1 million for mobilization.

ELSIE NGOWO MBELLA NGOMBA (Cameroon) said that in spite of procedural differences, the overall objective remained the same. The relevance of a Summit on the problems of children in the 1990s would be lost if the meeting were delayed to a later year. The Board should arrange for the meeting as early as possible.

SAODAH B.A. SYAHRUDDIN (Indonesia) reiterated her delegation's support for convening the Summit in 1990, but regretted that agreement on arrangements had not yet been reached. She supported Canada's proposal that the current session of the Board remain open in order to permit further consideration of the proposals.

CHRIS KATSIAGAZI (Uganda) said that since African leaders had already endorsed the convening of a Summit for Children, such a meeting should be held as soon as possible. Holding the meeting in September 1990 would be timely in relation to the Decade for the African Child. He strongly recommended that the Board approve the budgetary revisions proposed by the African Group.

MAHBUB KABIR (Bangladesh) reiterated firm support for holding of a World Summit as proposed by the Group of Six. Even though differences still existed, he hoped they would be soon resolved with flexibility on all sides. Bangladesh wanted a Summit which would deal with the problems of children in the 1990s.

RITA DI MARTINO (United States) said the focus of the Summit should be to produce results which would have direct benefit for children. Some differences

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had arisen not regarding the Summit itself, but in relation to the planning modality. She supported Canada's recommendation that the question be postponed to permit time for arriving at consensus.

DING YUAN HONG (China) said the six initiators had shown flexibility on the date of the proposed Summit, and the question of the budget was yet to be resolved. China believed the proposed composition of the Planning Committee was a good one, but supported enlarging it a little in order to enhance participation. He hoped all parties would show flexibility for the sake of the children of the world in order to make the Summit a success.

JORGE MONTANO (Mexico) said the two proposals on planning modalities indicated that a basis existed for merging the differing views. The Board could see that the objectives of both groups were the same. He welcomed the willingness of the Netherlands to continue negotiations on the issues which had been raised. Postponement of consideration of the matter until January would not preclude the submission of additional proposals.

NARONG SASITORN (Thailand) said that his delegation believed that a Summit was of great importance and hoped that constructive negotiations could proceed.

ASHRAF QURESHI (Pakistan) said that his delegation did not believe in drawing a bottom line and supported the proposal put forth by Canada to reconvene in January.

ANNE EHRENREICH (Denmark) said that her Government would like to have a Summit and believed that it was important to continue negotiations.

SALAH M. ALI (Sudan) said that his delegation welcomed the initiative by the six to hold a Summit and agreed that the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly, September of 1990, would be an appropriate time to hold it. His Government also would like to see the preparatory committee enlarged. The President of Sudan had approved the idea when it was first proposed to him.

JAN ELIASSON (Sweden) said his delegation agreed with the fellow initiators and found the contributions from delegations during this session constructive. The common ground was impressive because all States wanted to focus attention on the world's children. But it was important not to lose political momentum, he said. What was problematic was the planning and the links to UNICEF. The initiators would like to go forward without losing momentum. They did not want to be seen as an exclusive club. It was possible that more discussion was needed and delegations might need to consult with their Governments. It was possible not to dramatize the break if they needed more time, but to continue meeting in the same constructive manner.

HIDEO KAGAMI (Japan) said that there was a broad agreement on the need for a Summit for 1990, so it was not necessary to continue that discussion. The linkage between the United Nations and a Summit, however, was a matter of concern. He was not sure if this difficulty could be overcome during the discussions today or tomorrow. If that was the case, delegations should meet

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early in 1990. Could the Board agree on setting a ceiling for a Summit and for mobilization activities? If it was possible to agree on those points, further discussion would be worthwhile. When we consider the various schedules, he said, it might not be easy to agree on a time for a further meeting. At that time, the budget would also have to be discussed. The timing for reconvening a special session could be tricky, so perhaps it would be best to proceed, he suggested.

JUAN SALAZAR-SANCISI (Ecuador) said that resolute support for a World Summit was encouraging. His delegation could agree on the date suggested. It would, however, like to see the preparatory committee expanded and would like to see the same constructive spirit in those discussions.

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