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Remarks by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Ceremony for Presenting an Award to USAID
for its
Contribution to Oral Rehydration Therapy

Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.
2 March 1994

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I am delighted, and deeply honoured, to be here today and to have the opportunity to recognize the central role of the US Agency for International Development in one of this century's greatest success stories in the field of health and development.

Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) against the lethal dehydration of diarrhoea is one of the pillars of the Child Survival and Development Revolution, a revolution that has already saved the lives of more than 20 million children in the developing world. ORT itself is now saving a million young lives every year, at very low cost, in the clinics and homes of the world's poor.

Following close on the achievement of universal child immunization in 1990, ORT is demonstrating our new capacity to reach all children -- all people -- with the benefits of modern science and medicine. And because we know that we have that capacity, we also know that we cannot -- in good conscience -- deny those basic benefits to anyone. In our era, basic human needs are being transformed into basic human rights. And if sharing these basic benefits of modern civilization is a moral good, it is also a very practical one.

At the recent launching of UNICEF's State of the World's Children report at the White House, President Clinton rightly emphasized the duty to improve the lives of children in other lands "not out of simple charity, but also out of prudence."

Charity and prudence, generosity and effectiveness, vision and courage -- these words begin to describe USAID's role in the ORT story, dating back to the days before it was discovered in 1968.

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that a majority of the 1 million children whose lives are saved each year thanks to ORT, owe their lives -- directly or indirectly -- to the US Agency for International Development. USAID largely financed the brilliant multi-year research that led to the discovery of ORT at what would become the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease

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Research in Bangladesh -- and it is still the main funder of the ICDDR,B today. Its role was publicly recognized by an award to USAID from the Prime Minister of Bangladesh just one month ago. USAID took the lead in involving UNICEF, WHO and other UN partners in sponsorship of the series of ICORT meetings, beginning in 1983, that legitimated ORT and won converts on a global scale. And, most importantly, USAID has pioneered international support for its widespread application, beginning with the extraordinary nationwide success in Egypt in 1985 and continuing today in many countries.

It certainly took vision and courage for USAID to embrace ORT the way it did, often in the face of incredulity from elsewhere in the bureaucracy and skepticism from taxpayers unaware of the terrible toll of diarrhoea around the world.

USAID's support for ORT -- and the entire Child Survival and Development Revolution -- has been more than exemplary, and let me say for the record that many of the kudos that have gone to UNICEF and others over the years rightfully belong to USAID and its dedicated leaders and staff. This support will be especially critical in the coming years, as the world accelerates its efforts to meet the children's goals for 1995 and the year 2000. We know we can continue to count on USAID.

Our heartfelt gratitude also goes out to WHO, UNDP, the ICDDR,B, the World Bank, health ministries and other strategic partners in this noble undertaking.

Seldom do we have in our hands the means to improve the lives of so many in such a short time, at such a low cost! Let us all work together to realize the full potential of ORT, which in only 21 months could be saving an additional two million lives.

And so it is with great pleasure that I present this UNICEF award to USAID in the person of its able new Administrator, my friend Brian Atwood.

Thank you.