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Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
on the signing of the
Declaration and Plan of Action of the 1990 World Summit for Children
by
President Boris Yeltsin

United Nations
31 January 1992



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Statement by James P. Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF
 on the signing of the Declaration and Plan of Action
 of the 1990 World Summit for Children by President Boris Yeltsin
 United Nations, 31 January 1992

UNICEF is delighted that President Yeltsin could set aside some of his time at the United Nations today to sign the World Declaration and the Plan of Action from the World Summit for Children. They were initialled on 30 September 1990 by then Foreign Minister Shevardnadze.

This is not just another document. It is a commitment to a totally new approach to improve the situation of children, both in the Russian Federation and the rest of the world. It is a new philosophy that puts children first in every human endeavour, in good and bad times, in war and in peace. It is a new strategy for upholding the concept of a first call for children for both State and society. In these momentous and difficult times for Russia, UNICEF believes that this Plan of Action can give a new direction to the Russian policies regarding children, especially in the areas of health and education, and we hope that President Yeltsin, back in Moscow, will be able to give the necessary instructions for this new approach.

UNICEF will be sending a mission to Russia between 16 and 28 February to assess the situation of children and women, determine the immediate and medium-term needs, and report to its Executive Board. This mission will meet with high-level Russian authorities. A preliminary mission which went to Moscow this week to help organize the work ahead was met with great enthusiasm and cooperation, for which UNICEF is most grateful.

The mission alone will not solve the problems. UNICEF is only a very small organization, but luckily much more is happening on the aid side which hopefully will have immediate results. But it may spark a rethinking of policies regarding children, starting with the belief that safety nets for children and women are indispensable in this difficult transition to market economy (this is what UNICEF calls adjustment with a human face), with the encouragement of the Russian Government to adopt and carry out a National Plan of Action based on the Summit commitments, and with the unrelenting advocacy that prevention is better than cure. Depending on the gravity of the situation, UNICEF may also be able to mobilize help especially for children's health care, starting with immunization against the six major child killer diseases -- measles, polio, tuberculosis, whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria.

UNICEF also hopes that, as in so many other industrialized countries, Russia will be able to establish a National Committee for UNICEF, to undertake advocacy for the Russian children and also help children of the developing countries. We also trust that the future National Committee will be able to do much good work towards the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by the USSR and is therefore binding on the Russian Federation.

UNICEF believes that all this will strengthen even more the relationship between Russia and UNICEF, as part of a grand alliance for the survival, the protection and the development of the world's children.

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