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Audrey Hepburn's Statement to the UNICEF Executive Board. 21 April 1989

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AUDREY HEPBURN'S STATEMENT TO THE UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD

FRIDAY, 21 APRIL 1989

First may I thank you all for sharing your very precious time with me and I feel doubly honoured. I would also like to express my immense gratitude to James Grant for having given me the privilege of becoming a volunteer for UNICEF and having allowed me to speak for those children who cannot speak for themselves.

UNICEF's mandate is to protect every child against famine, thirst, sickness, abuse and death. but today we are dealing with a far more ominous threat, man's inhumanity to man with the dark side of humanity: selfishness, avarice, aggression, which has already polluted our skies, emptied our oceans, destroyed our forests and extinguished thousands of beautiful animals. Are our children next?

That is what UNICEF is up against, for it is no longer enough to vaccinate our children, or to give them food and water, and only cure the symptoms of man's tendency to destroy - to destroy everything we hold dear - everything life depends on - the very air we breathe - the earth that sustains us - and the most precious of all, our children.

Whether it be famine in Ethiopia, excruciating poverty in Guatemala and Honduras, civil strife in El Salvador or ethnic massacre in the Sudan. I saw but one glaring truth. These are not natural disasters but manmade tragedies for which there is only one manmade solution - peace - and that is what James Grant has long understood and has worked tirelessly toward for many long months.

He has achieved the first giant step by negotiating corridors of peace in the Sudan. This enormous country, the largest in Africa, where one of the most brutal civil wars ever known to man is being waged, where virtually all the population has been uprooted and displaced in living fear of four threats, all of them deadly: the government troops, the rebels, armed bandits and famine.

I have seen hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in the camps I visited, both in the Government North and the rebel held South - camps and now overcrowded towns where hundreds of newcomers every day still everyday after months of walking - many die on the way - phantoms carrying their sick transparent babies - but reaching their destination urged on by the one human quality which is the last to die ... hope.

Even if this mammoth Operation Lifeline Sudan were only to achieve half its goal, due to the countless odds its up against in a vast country with no infrastructure, few roads to speak of, no communication system, it will have succeeded, not only in saving thousands of lives, but together with the government, the rebels, the brave tireless NGOs, pilots, truckdrivers, loaders and operation officers, it will have given the Sudan hope and the United Nations will have shown the world that only through corridors of tranquility can children be saved and only through peace will man survive.

There is so much we cannot do. We cannot give the children back their parents, but we can return to them their most basic human rights, their right to health, cleanliness and life.

Thank you