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Interview with Canon Joseph Moerman*, Secretary General
of The International Catholic Child Bureau
Conducted by Edward B. Marks in Geneva
on 24 October 1983

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Canon Joseph Moerman was Secretary-General of the International Catholic Child Bureau from 1 April 1967 until his retirement at the end of March 1985. He was the key initiator of the International Year of the Child, and during the Year he was Chairman of the NGO/IYC Committee. He was elected the president of the NGO Committee on UNICEF for a one year beginning April 1985.

Interview with Canon Joseph Moerman
of The International Catholic Child Bureau
Conducted by Edward B. Marks in Geneva
on 24 October 1983

Marks: Joseph, it is very nice to see you again; we worked together very closely in IYC and I value your friendship. I would be interested first, if you could tell me about your earlier contacts with UNICEF as ICCB has maintained contact over the years.

ICCB Contacts with UNICEF Prior To IYC

Moerman: Thank you. We have indeed always had good contact since we met and I would just say that the contact I had with you is an example of the easy contacts we had in ICCB at personal level with UNICEF. To be very frank, before the very start, the very first ideas about IYC, which go back to November/December 1972, our contacts were practically limited to contacts between the ICCB infrastructure in New York and UNICEF headquarters, but there were little or no contacts between UNICEF headquarters and the Secretary General of ICCB. When I started I had the impression with many of my Geneva counterparts in other INGO's that the NGO Committee on UNICEF was practically non-existent. We had the visit of Mildred Jones, I remember, before 1972, when she was the Chairperson of the NGO UNICEF Committee. She came with some other ladies from New York and we met with them, I don't think more than 20 people attended that

meeting. I considered myself, at that time, not very close to UNICEF. Nevertheless, I was viewed as one working closely with UNICEF. The feeling at that meeting was that these ladies were very good and that when they went back to New York things would not be as they were before.

Another contact with UNICEF, before I got more involved through the channel of IYC, was when the UNICEF Board met in Geneva in 1971. I was one of the NGO representatives to attend nearly the full session. Also, before the IYC idea was started, there was a meeting in Geneva on the study made by a UNICEF consultant, a Greek lady, Mrs. Rothschild on shanty towns and slums. But that, I would say, was nearly all we had of contact with UNICEF. Sometimes, of course, I visited the Regional Director for Geneva. but I cannot say that it was the nearly daily contact we have now.

I must, nevertheless, say that the UNICEF contacts were always good, which cannot be said about my time in Africa, when I was not yet with ICCB. I was in Africa as the Regional Director of CIU, the Catholic International Education Office, which is in charge of schools. I shall not name the place, I lived next to the UNICEF representative and was for five years his neighbour. I once succeeded in inviting him to drink a Scotch with me and that was that. All the other efforts I made did not succeed. At that time, of course, the mentality was not as it is now, at least with representatives of UNICEF. I don't want to fault the Front Office but there were UNICEF people who felt we NGO's were strange animals.

IYC

Origins of IYC

Marks: What about the conception of IYC?

Moerman: It was in November/December 1972 that I had the feeling the INGOs involved in childhood had no real policy, no great idea, that there was no dynamism, that it was nice daily work but no great passion. Furthermore, I was impressed when I got in touch with UN units and with other INGOs that while everybody felt compassion for the child, the subject of children was not an exciting item for government representatives. One of the reasons was that the child was not politically rewarding. The child is not of immediate interest; it does not vote. I may even say that a Latin American, I think he was a UNICEF representative, said that in the Latin American countries they only became interested in young people when they belong to the group which at the next election will be voters. As in many countries, they begin voting at eighteen, and as there are elections every four years, they become interested only when children are fifteen years old. Children of twelve or thirteen years are of lesser interest because at the next elections they will be unable to vote.

I had a rather passive vision of UNICEF through the absence of a real live committee. I was also impressed that while UNICEF did a lot of good for children, there were no great policy themes.

There was need for a second wind, something beyond the daily routine of work. Thinking and speaking to people I came to the idea, perhaps, why not an international year for the child. We were at that moment very much involved with the Stockholm Conference on the Environment. Everybody was speaking of the environment. We were preparing for the Population Year, which took place in 1974. We knew that there would be a women's year. I had the impression that the child in the coming decade would be of even less importance; the focus would be on women and population issues. In discussing these issues, the organisers were more interested in adult-related aspects than in the child. They were much more concerned for the well-being of the adult than they were with children. Also, in 1970-71, the focus of world attention was on youth. Remember the demonstration in France in May 1967. And a Youth Conference was held at United Nations in New York. So when people were dealing with the younger generation, it was youth rather than the child that got attention. Americans will remember that the White House Conference on Children and Youth, which used to be a single conference, was split in two conferences, because the President of the United States was aware that in a conference dealing with children and youth, people would only deal with youth and forget the child. So that was another reason for me to say that at international level we had to do something for the child similar to what was done in the United States through the White House Conference.

Secretary General's attitude

The first thing I had to do was to find out whether there would be a green light from the top of the United Nations. I drafted a letter in December 1972, which was signed by the President of ICCB at that time, Professor Michel Falise, a very fine man, a brilliant man, who is now Rector of the Catholic University in Lille France. He is also the President of the World Federation of the Catholic Universities. The letter was dated, if I remember, 2nd or 3rd January 1973 and it was sent directly to Mr. Waldheim by diplomatic pouch through the kindness of the UN. We received a letter back before the end of the month, I think it was dated 21st or 22nd January, in which Mr. Waldheim said he found the idea indeed interesting, that an International Year of the Child might be timely but that he could not do more than that. I did not expect that the Secretary-General of the United Nations could do more. Mr. Waldheim recommended that Mr. Falise go through the normal channels to develop the idea. This was very encouraging. Mr. Waldheim probably soon forgot that he had signed the letter, but in fact he played a much greater role in launching IYC than he imagined, because without such a letter, I would probably have been hesitant. But when I saw that, however briefly, he considered the idea, he was not against it, it was enough for me to go ahead.

Building support For IYC

The first thing I had to do, of course, was to convince my own Council of ICCB. The President agreed, but what about the Board?

You know the famous words utilized by Cicero, when he said, "The senators are fine people but the senate is an ugly animal." It is the same with all bodies of that type. Individually, the members are all very nice but when they are together they are often very difficult.

Three or four months later I had the green light from my own Council. They gave their consent but were more or less convinced that IYC would never succeed. How could the small INGO of ICCB succeed in mobilizing the world for such a project.

How did we start? We began by first establishing contacts with important INGOs which were friendly and which, I presumed, would support the idea. One such organization was the International Union for Child Welfare. They gave their support, although during the Year they did not do much, probably due to the fact that they were having problems of their own. Then came the YMCA and YWCA, and I am still grateful to those two organisations because they were very, very strongly motivated. Also, the World Congress of Churches The World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP). One of the reasons for the fine support of WCOTB was that my ICCB assistant at that time, Mrs. Pat Smyke, was the wife of the WCOTB Deputy Secretary General. Once they were convinced, I had the support of this powerful organisation. We had our first meeting, five or six NGOs, at the Headquarters of the YMCA.

Marks: That was an ad hoc meeting?

Moerman: Yes, it was an ad hoc meeting just to see how we would get on. After that we contacted several other NGO's, I would need to go to the archives to have all the details, but by the end of 1973 or the beginning of 1974, we had a meeting in Geneva with about 60 to 70 NGO's to deal with the matter and of course, UNICEF got more and more interested or at least alerted.

UNICEF's Early stance

About this time, I got in touch with the Regional Director, who was very polite; he was an Englishman who spoke very good French. Gordon Carter? So he reported to the Headquarters and the Front Desk and I know that there was considerable reluctance. UNICEF people know this better than I do. Through a channel, I completely forgot who it was, but it was truly a confidential channel, I had an internal note signed by Mr. Labouisse in which he said UNICEF could not support the Canon's proposal as it would paralyze its ongoing work, etc, etc. From this, I knew what the attitude of UNICEF was and later spoke about it with Mr. Labouisse because we became great friends. I said, "You know very well what was your first reaction." He said, "I was against it in the beginning but I was wrong." I still admire Henry Labouisse for his sincerity there. He recognised that it was a wrong judgement and that he had to change his opinion, and after all, the Year of the Child was very fruitful and helpful for UNICEF. In those early days, Mr. Labouisse asked somebody to come to Geneva and visit with me. That was Charles Egger. I had absolutely the feeling that Charles Egger

came as a grand inquisitor to see what type of man Canon Moerman was. I believe some people in UNICEF, and in other circles, thought that organising an International Year of the Child was a way for Catholic circles to counterbalance the Population Year. Rome was very upset with the Population Year and some thought The Year of the Child would be an occasion to counteract the mentality of the Population Year. I must say that during the Year some people tried to influence me to make IYC a pro-population control Year and not a pro-Year of the Child.

Marks: They wanted the Year of the Child to advance the aims of the Population Year?

Vatican coolness

Moerman: Yes. Some people wanted to make it a second Population Year focussing on population control, and others wanted to make it the opposite. Here I must say that there has been some providential help, because when I informed the Vatican that I wanted to organise an International Year of the Child that, ICCB agreed, and that I hoped that the Vatican would give its support, the answer was not "no", but it was very cool. One day I was alerted by an Ambassador at UN Geneva, who called me and said, "Dear friend, do you know that you are persona non grata with the Vatican?" I did not know it at all. The Vatican had sent a note to the Ambassadors assigned to the vatican in Rome saying that the initiative for IYC came from a Catholic priest who was persona non grata and that they should not take account of it.

Marks: When was that?

Moerman: That was, I would say, in 1975 or something like that. That was the first time I saw that the reserved attitude of the Vatican was really opposition. I can speak long about that because it led to tensions between the Vatican and some governments which did not accept the reaction of the Vatican in this matter. When I look back on that, and with my Christian faith, I think that the ire of the Vatican was prophetic or providential, because if the Vatican had strongly supported the idea of the Year of the Child, it would probably never have succeeded. It was because people were aware that the Vatican was reluctant and even hostile that some people supported it. Fortunately, I myself never acted in opposition to the Vatican because when I learned that the Vatican was hostile, things were too much advanced and there was no longer any question and there was no turning back. If I had stopped then, others would have picked it up and it would have been in hands less safe for the Vatican than it was in my hands. So when people at UN Headquarters, UNICEF and among governments recognized that it would not be a Year in which controversial matters would be raised, the IYC proposal went ahead. The concept of the Year of the Child was approved by the UNICEF Executive Board, then went to the ECOSOC Council, where they wanted to have more details, because they thought it would be too expensive. Finally, a year later, the only thing I can remember is that the General Assembly approved the proposal on 21st December 1976; that I will remember always.

Marks: I remember, we had a drink the day it was approved in the Second Committee.

Moerman: Yes, it was the first drink I had after it was adopted in the Second Committee. Of course when it was adopted by the Committee it was no longer a problem for the General Assembly.

So I would say that the growth of support was achieved by first working with friendly NGO's, some of whom were Catholic, some non-Catholic and some totally neutral, non-denominational organisations. From there, we widened the group of NGOs, made more contacts with UNICEF and then went through Executive Board of UNICEF and ECOSOC to gain the support of governments. That was how it succeeded and the proposal of the Year of the Child was adopted.

Governmental attitudes

Marks: Would you say that some governments were particularly helpful in these earlier stages?

Moerman: Yes, some governments. Radical hostility you could not find, because, as somebody said, who could be against it? But many tried to convince me that it was not opportune, that it was not suitable, that it should not happen. Some felt that it would be too expensive, e.g. the United States and United Kingdom. The first government which strongly supported the idea publicly was India. Its delegate at the UNICEF Executive Board, Mr. Lutha, was one of those who very strongly backed it. There was no real hostility,

but some displayed a reserved attitude, because even when the first proposals were adopted in ECOSOC, there was abstention by some friendly countries. Some countries hesitated because they wondered what was behind the support of the idea by communist countries. I feel that it helped to get the support of some of the Western Countries through my good contacts, personal, friendly contacts, with some of their governmental delegates in Geneva and at the New York meetings. On the other hand, I must say that although I was a priest, I never felt any opposition to the Year of the Child from Eastern European countries and I never hid the fact that I was a priest. I always wore my Roman collar. There was no opposition.

People sometimes feared that others wanted to make politics out of it, but I must say that during the whole Year of the Child, I was very strict if anyone tried to poison the Year with politics. I am happy to say that during the Year itself and the three years of preparation, I never once had serious political difficulty; nothing. The tensions which are daily, e.g. in the ECOSOC Conference of NGOs, and in other UN meetings, those tensions did not exist at all in our NGO/IYC Committee, and at our plenaries, where we had representatives of up to 200 organisations. When I went to Moscow to speak, I was received in a friendly manner, and said what I wanted to. What I said was not one hundred percent what they wanted me to say, but they remained polite. I think that was one of the most striking things about the whole Year; it was so little involved in the political aspect.

Marks: Yes, certainly the Eastern European countries, each in its own way, made for a very good observance of the Year. Any countries you can think of that were especially helpful at that outset?

Moerman: The Latin American countries - Colombia and Argentina in particular. The black African countries, generally speaking, because first of all they said it could not do any harm; it could only be useful. Since I myself, spent ten years as a missionary in Black Africa, many Africans knew me and there was spontaneous confidence; there was no opposition from the countries of Africa, south of the Sahara.

Marks: How about Western Europe?

Moerman: Western Europe was responsive. This was due partly to my personal contacts in Holland. The man who became chairman of the UNICEF Executive Board, Ambassador Van Scheltema and several other people in Holland were very helpful. I had more difficulties in my own country, Belgium. Although they gave wise advice on some problems, they were not among the most enthusiastic in the beginning. But when they saw IYC was a success, they moved in and were happy to have had some part in initiating it.

Marks: The Scandinavians certainly-

Moerman: Sure, sure. I must say that the first who committed money for the Year were the Scandinavians - the Norwegians gave \$500,000. Also Iran at that time, the Iran of the Shah; but we found he made

pledges and promised a lot of things. We were aware, later, that he wanted to have a World Conference in Iran, or that he was to support some activities in Iran rather than support the global activities as such.

Marks: Holland also gave \$500,000, I think.

Moerman: Yes, yes.

Decision not to have a World Conference

Marks: You mentioned "World Conference". When I came into the picture, it had already been decided not to have a World Conference, and I always felt it was a wise decision. But can you tell me - there must have been some pros and cons before that was decided?

Moerman: Well, from the beginning I said that I did not want a World Conference, because I was convinced that the proposal of a World Conference would not succeed. I had attended the Bucharest Population Conference, and my feeling was, in spite of what people might say about Bucharest, that it was a waste of time and money. Bucharest, I was told, cost six million dollars; since that time there has been a similar conference which cost twelve million dollars. The whole IYC only cost, for a period of four years' work - three years' preparation and the year itself - \$7.2 million so there's no comparison to the result of a single conference where you have political declarations and statements without real work at a national level. I, from the very beginning, was against the idea

of a world conference. There were some pressures - some people were very disappointed but as far as I can remember, not very many in the UN system. The UNICEF Secretariat and Board were against a World Conference. The questions came rather from NGO's and some governments, but governments who would not have to pay. Those that would have to pay, such as the United States, were of course not in favour. They hardly agreed to the budget of \$7.2 million. We should remember that the first approved budget for IYC was only \$4 million; later increased to \$7.2 million. For our own NGO/IYC Committee, the whole budget for three years was \$600,000, a large part of which came from UNICEF.

"Child" versus "youth" in IYC

Another point debated at the beginning was, should it be a year of the child and the youth, or only a year for the child. I strongly emphasised only "the child" because, as I told you in the beginning, people were so concentrated on youth issues after the events of May '68, in Paris and the Conference in New York, that I was afraid if we dealt with children and youth, we would, in effect, deal only with youth and forget the children. So that was why I was against it. However, I always emphasised that youth should not be neglected, and that I saw a role for youth. That's what I have said in recent months to those in charge of the International Youth Year. Ask youth to get involved in children's work; to be leaders of children's movements; to organize camps for children. Even from very tough or difficult boys or girls you will get more than you expect, because when they feel they have some

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responsibility to work for younger children - people younger than they are - they became completely changed; it matures them. So that is what I recommended very often in statements and speeches, etc., about the role of youth. I said that youth should be asked to play an important role in the Year of the Child.

Key supporters of IYC idea

Marks: Good. Now, before we leave the preparation of the Year, can you think of a few individuals - either NGO or national or possibly in the UN system, who were particularly helpful in this earlier stage?

Moerman: Well, without knowing it, Mr. Waldheim was a great help. In the very early stage, in UNICEF, I think that Jack Charnow was among the first to be aware of the possibilities given by such a year. I very soon felt that you, Edward Marks, were also in favour. Sheila Barry was also in favour, but she was, of course, the assistant to Jack Charnow.

There was sympathy in the UN system, because I visited many specialized agencies. WHO, Dr. Mahler, agreed in principle, and I got in touch with several WHO departments where there were individuals who strongly supported the idea. The same was true of the ILO, especially as related to child labour. The same at UNESCO, though I had no contacts at top level, whereas in ILO and WHO I had such contacts. There was also early understanding for IYC's aims in the Division of Human Rights, which at that time was still headed by a Belgian, Mr. Marc Schreiber. From the NGO side,

of course, Michel Falise (whom I've mentioned already) was a most solid support for the year. Of course I should mention the two directors of the Secretariats for the IYC, John Grun and Jim McDougall, along with their staff, who were very helpful. I never felt that I was an outsider when I was in the office, either in New York or in Geneva. Also, we cannot forget Mrs. Lim, who was very devoted. She was not the type of 'desk' person to make long reports, but took trips to many countries which would not have worked with IYC if it had not been for her initiative. She was a nice person; and of course ladies were pleased to meet her, with the consequence that something happened in the country. That's not the most classical way of proceeding for certain people, but everybody, as we say, has his or her own charisma and one has to find one's own charisma.

Up to now I have not mentioned a person who has played a decisive role in the preparation and the development of IYC because I was always speaking of people outside my own organization, ICCB. But if we want to establish a kind of list of persons who have played a key role in the whole IYC issue we should mention Mrs. Pat Snyke among the very first. This is not only an NGO viewpoint; it is a feeling also shared by UNICEF people.

Chief results of IYC

Moerman: The most global result of IYC is surely that when you get in touch with governments or with private organizations in whatever country, and when you say that you are working for children, you have a

better audience. People much more easily accept the idea that indeed something has to be done for children. I would be inclined to say that a great benefit of the Year of the Child is that, generally speaking, greater attention is given to children, and that, for instance, even the present child health revolution and all the very dynamic policies of Jim Grant, would not have had the repercussions they have had without the Year of the Child.

Now there is an attitude - a general feeling and public opinion that we have to deal with all aspects of children, that it is an urgent matter, and that we should get involved in child-related issues everywhere in the world. I would say that's most important. The Year of the Child created an enormous potential of interest and involvement with children that we still see daily.

Now, as to concrete achievements - I would say that they occurred at national level. The Year of the Child was introduced to give a better stimulus and impetus for children's well-being at national level. There was no global, united policy, and we see from the consequences, that apart from this heightened awareness and consciousness there are no unified world activities. The situation differs from country to country. Some countries still have a national organization for children as a consequence of the national committee which existed at the time of IYC. Other countries have a ministry for children or a department for children in the Ministry of Health, or have established more specialized institutions. We shouldn't forget that the Year for Disabled Persons really stepped into the shoes of IYC for many things. I would say that to assess

the complete results, one would have to ask in each country what were the achievements of the national commission, the Government and others concerned with the Year.

We so often receive here project proposals for work in the Third World. The people who ask for help are always referring to IYC. Since IYC, we have done our best to respond. Today I received a book published by the ??? under the title of "Protection Internationale de Droits d'Enfant", which reports that were carried out through ??? - the Droits Internationale is the Revolution Internationale like the ???. That work was carried out in The Hague in 1979, that was the contribution of the Academy of International Law of The Hague, to IYC. The book was only just published, because it involved a lot of work; it is a very scientific and solid book. I have spoken about it because you are here today, but I could probably give you every day, an anecdote or fact that is related to what happened during IYC. I should also mention, as one of the achievements of the Year, that a number of countries have adapted their legislation or have introduced new legislation related to children. There again, one should go through the different countries. When people ask me to speak in detail about the follow-up and the consequences, my answer is that I have to do other things so I leave it to other people to check what happened. I am now going further with my own work, which is children and the special programmes of ICCB.

People may wonder what were the weak points of the Year; That's difficult to answer; there were surely weak points - the first obvious thing, one can say, is that if we had had more money we would have done more. After all, the potential donors were a little bit mean in providing only \$7.2 million for the whole programme over three years. In one of my interventions at ECOSOC I said that this was the cost of a wing of a fighter plane. We have not had even one fighter, one military plane; we have just had the equivalent of a wing of a plane. So I would be tempted to say that from the UN point of view, relatively much has been accomplished with an amount which for UNICEF and for the United Nations was relatively small. Much hard work had been done.

Lack of strong follow-up to IYC

Frankly, I must say that I have never raised for myself that very sharp question, "If it had to be redone, what would you do in a different way?" I think it would be more or less the same. I don't know what I should have done in a different way.

The only thing I regretted is that perhaps on UNICEF's side and on the side of the NGO's, we have not had a strong body or at least a focal point to follow up. UNICEF, of course, has developed its programmes further and there were other consequences, but on 31st December 1979, there it was - IYC was over and there was a return to the routine activities, business as usual. That IYC impetus, that enthusiasm certainly has not been exploited one hundred per cent. The question was raised in the NGO/IYC Committee. The

Committee was extended, fortunately, to the end of 1980 which allowed us to do something, but at the final Plenary Session of the Committee which, if I am right, took place in May 1980, we decided not to continue the Committee because it was obvious that we would not have the money. Also, there was a very strong view to place all that in hands of the NGO Committee for UNICEF which as a consequence could enlarge its scope and be strengthened. The decision was that the work would be taken over by the NGO Committee on UNICEF and the UNICEF Secretariat itself.

So I would say that the main failure was the lack of immediate strong follow-up in the hands of an ad hoc body or at least a focal point to carry on with the actions of the NGO/IYC Committee. Some people were disappointed that the NGO/IYC Committee no longer existed. We still get letters here from some people who consider ICCB as a follow-up unit, although they know we are a denominational organization. They say, "well, we don't care if you're Catholic or non-Catholic, you have the work in hand so remain in contact with us." I think that even now, fifty percent of our mail is from non-Catholic organisations. One reason that we have contact with all kinds of organisations is that the main programme of ICCB is now with street children. In the NGO Council of the programme on street children, which is a working group of NGO Committee on UNICEF we also have non-catholic organisations.

Proposed "Convention" on children's rights

Marks: Before the Year of the Child, in fact going back quite a few years, we had the Declaration, and when someone asked what was the text for the Year, or what were our principles, we said that we already had something on the books, a Declaration. Do you feel that the Declaration served that purpose, and how do you feel about the efforts now being made to make a Convention of it?

Moerman: Well, I would say the Declaration was well utilized. Many people referred to it to motivate the Year of the Child, saying that although the Declaration existed, it was not in fact respected, etc. Then came the proposal submitted in February 1978 by Poland, to have a Convention. The first text submitted by Poland was nothing but the text of the Declaration with the addition of some paragraphs of legal aspect. It was unworkable as a Convention, because a Convention is totally different from a Declaration; a Declaration is a declaration of principles, while a Convention is a legal instrument. For that reason - and for another, which I'll give you - I made a statement in the Human Rights Session of 1978 asking for a postponement in its consideration. My argument was, first of all, that the Declaration text was not a legal text. If you say, "the child should - the child should" - that is not binding for a government. A Convention should be a binding text for the governments which sign it. Also, I wondered whether after tedious preparation of the Year of the Child, and after the Year itself, we might not have some new insights which would enrich the Convention, and whether it would not be wiser to postpone the whole

debate until at least February 1980. This was what, in fact, happened. I am now the Chairman of an informal group - there's only one - of NGO's, preparing proposals for the Convention. We have made a very detailed statement, which will be circulated in the coming weeks among Governments, where we give the proposals of about 26 NGO's. The Secretariat of the working group is based at Defence for Children.

Preparing a text poses a real problem, and there are different points of view. Should the Convention be a combination of all the texts already in existing Conventions and other instruments, and all that is related to children, or should it go further? It's difficult to know how far to go, because you can draw up a Convention which would be a whole book if you want to go into details. Some people want to go into too much detail, which, in my view, would then make it unworkable, with the danger also, that some countries will say it's all Western; or that it is not applicable to them; or that the situation is totally different for us, and many governments would not sign it.

That's the danger, so I am against going too much into detail. I feel we should put together the ideas which exist already, perhaps emphasise some aspects which are not yet spelt out in existing instruments, but not go too much into detail. On the other hand, in the spirit of IYC, not too much politicization of the Debate. Happily, although our working group has representatives of all tendencies, we have not had ideological debates, so there are no controversial issues, which is good. And even the governments,

when the Commission meets, don't play politics too much: for example, when they discuss parents who are considered unable or unqualified to keep their children; or when children should be given custody. There are two extreme dangers - one is to say that as soon as something is wrong, it should go to the State. Some people were afraid that the USSR would immediately say, that as soon as something occurs - you have to give the child to the state. The other danger is to be so liberal as to always say no, the parents are the natural guardians of the child. There is, of course, the danger that they will maltreat their children and lose public approval. In the Debate that took place, I was aware that both Russians and Americans hesitated about spelling this out, because neither could exactly phrase it, because, in fact, both agreed that you should not hand over children to the State too soon, but not too late. But to say where it is, or how to phrase it, those carrying on the discussion were politicians and officials, but not child specialists. They did not appear to be prejudiced or arbitrary; they were consulting among themselves as to what was really desirable. I'm afraid that we still have three or four years' debate before this Convention will be adopted.

Marks: Well, it keeps things alive, and in the spirit of keeping things alive, I wonder, now as you think back on IYC, what you feel were the chief gains as a result of the Year, and what were the missed opportunities - not necessarily during the Year itself, but perhaps in the follow-up?

ICCB and street children

Marks: The problem of street children is of course an important aspect of the UNICEF programme too. Do you want to say a word about where it is going?

Moerman: We decided in ICCB that after IYC, in order to be able to give an example to others, our main programme for the next three years (1980-83) would stem from one of the main issues highlighted during IYC. There were several possibilities, but the Council finally decided that the most workable cause was a major programme on street children. We felt very quickly that if we wanted to be really efficient, we should again establish an inter-NGO unit, which now exists. The office is here in our general ICCB secretariat but the budget is handled differently and they have their own Council. Of course, ICCB gives a large sum to it, but others contributed as well. I am the chairman of the council, but I am also a member, along with the World Council of Churches, Child-to-Child, the Christian Children's Fund of the United States and some others.

Marks: How is it related to the NGO Committee for UNICEF?

Moerman: I convinced the NGO Committee that it should be a working group of the NGO Committee. So we are a Working Group, and sometimes we send a letter to Victor Auramjo the Chairman of NGO Committee, but in fact that's a flag, that's a title. We don't get much support from the Committee as such.

Marks: You are pretty autonomous?

Moerman: Yes. We are totally autonomous but we don't do anything that is against the spirit of UNICEF. On the contrary, the UNICEF Geneva Office always attends not only the meetings of the Council, but also the meetings of the Standing Group. The Council is composed of the members of the Council who are based in Geneva, so that we can have a quick meeting. The meetings are often held at the UNICEF Office with attendance by a UNICEF staff member. We got very strong help from Don Shields of UNICEF. He was very helpful in promoting it. We cannot complain at all about the treatment we got from the Regional Office or the Headquarters Office in Geneva as it is now called.

The programme of regional seminars is starting. The first meeting in Marseilles was for the street children of the main Mediterranean cities, Barcelona and Valencia in Spain; Marseilles in France; Genoa, Naples and Palermo in Italy and representatives of Tunisia, Egypt and Israel were also present. Generally speaking, the Mayors of the cities supported us and some delegates came at the expense of their mayor. The French Government gave a small grant of 40,000 Fr. francs to show their sympathy for this initiative. The seminar in Marseilles was chaired by Mr. Fernand-Laurent, the former Ambassador of France to the UN in Geneva. Perhaps you know him. He was very very helpful. I was invited to chair the meeting but since we were involved with the next ICCB general congress and general assembly, I preferred to stay two days longer in Geneva and have him chair the meeting. I went for the conclusions and the Council meeting that followed.

Marks: I can't help but comment that this programme, as you described it, included the street children in industrialized countries. Perhaps in some of the less advanced European industrialized countries but still not only those of developing countries. That follows on a bit from IYC where we were concerned as you remember with children all over the world.

Moerman: That is a good example of how a programme which is applicable both in industrialized and developing countries is accepted since IYC. We recognize there are common problems, and that you have to develop programmes which are global in character. The experience we have had in Latin America, where the problem is best known, and even in Africa, is that when you have a growing city, an urban area with industry, you have exactly the same problems you have had in the industrial countries, in the big urban areas of Europe or North America, etc. Indeed, our programme contemplates seminars for French speaking black Africa , English-speaking Black-Africa, Latin America and India.

Marks: So while most of the subsequent seminars will be in the developing countries, they will benefit from the experience in Europe?

Moerman: We started in Marseilles because it was closer, because it was easier to organise and because in fact the problem is very real in cities like Palermo and Naples where you have nearly as many street children as in Bogotá.

NGO Committee for UNICEF

Marks: Reverting a little bit to what you said before about the new structure of the NGO Committee for UNICEF, I would be interested if you have any special comments on how it is working out and also on the new structure of the UNICEF Office in Geneva.

Moerman: To start with the UNICEF Committee, we had the experience that the NGO/IYC Committee worked very well on both sides of the Atlantic. I will explain how it worked. There was no problem, no tension, it was efficient on both sides and it remained a single Committee. The NGO Committee on UNICEF has existed for several decades. It is practically not known in Europe and in New York. The people involved were those living in the New York area. There is not much coming out of the Committee. I don't much blame the people, they are all volunteers, they do what they can, they are very friendly and they have supported some projects, for instance in Kenya. This is not a criticism, but it is surely not the kind of committee which can create great enthusiasm and which can provide a solid cooperation between UNICEF and strong INGOs which have their own ideas, own identities, etc., etc. I know that practically all of the Secretaries-General of the INGOs do not even read the letters that they receive from the Committee. They say "Oh we have a representative over there, they are dealing with New York issues and they do it well, we have no complaints, but we have other things to do." So the idea now is to build up an NGO Committee

with the same parallel structure as the NGO/IYC Committee: this means that we would have a Council on both sides of the ocean composed of representatives of the same INGOs. The Council would meet alternatively in Geneva and in New York. On each side, they can organise informal meetings and council meetings. I think the people in New York would need more than one council meeting a year. They would probably think so too. There would be a president of practically equal status, one based in New York and one in Geneva.

Marks: You mean that one year the president would be in New York and the next year the president would be in Geneva.

Moerman: Yes, and the deputy would be in the other location. On each side there would be a vice-president and a secretary, a treasurer would be based in New York. But we would have one Committee. That is as far as the structure is concerned.

I am a little bit puzzled with the text of the new rules. In my belief they are too heavy, too complicated for a very weak body. There are too many deadlines to observe, to convene a meeting with so many weeks prior notice, to elect a president every year, there are too many statutory meetings and not enough operational meetings. What I tell you is not a secret; you probably heard it, I was asked to be the president this year. I refused because of the surgery I had to undergo and because the doctor said that I should work at a more leisurely pace. Though I am working full time, it was not a good time to accept the presidency, because I am

convinced that the first president in Geneva, should be dynamic and create a new tradition. There is no tradition of the committee in Geneva. I said that I would agree to become the president, once I am no longer Secretary-General of ICCB. In 1985 I will retire at 65 and I would accept the presidency and really spend a lot of time establishing a solid basis here in Geneva. In the meantime I have agreed to be the deputy president. Maybe when I take up the presidency I will no longer have to do much to ensure that the Committee is firmly established.

UNICEF HQ in Geneva

Marks: What about the new structure of UNICEF in Geneva, which has actually become an external relations part of Headquarters?

Moerman: We are happy that the office here is a part of the Headquarters. We are aware that it is has not always been very smooth, that there are things to be settled, but we are happy with the change. I personally have never had to complain about my relations with the people in the office under the old arrangement. People were always nice and cooperative. I explained this in a recent letter to Alba Zizzamia who is the president of the Conference of NGOs in consultancy status with ECOSOC. The text of my letter is in French, because my English secretary was overburdened. There I explained the whole philosophy of my contacts with UN in general, and with UNICEF in more detail. I am convinced, as I said in my statement last year when we had a consultation with UNICEF on UNICEF/NGO relations that there is a total difference between the

mentality of an NGO Committee on UNICEF and an NGO Committee on ECOSOC. The NGO Committee on ECOSOC is a committee to defend, interpret and comment. The term was "consultative status" and implies by its very nature the kind of confrontation and conflict existing between NGOs which want to defend their rights and ECOSOC which represents governments. Whereas, at least in my view, the NGO Committee for UNICEF is an instrument to provide convergence on all efforts at international level for children, whether they be non-governmental or governmental. The NGO Committee can help insure that we have only one child policy at international level under the umbrella of UNICEF, leaving the NGOs of course at liberty, but not working without contact with UNICEF. I believe that as soon as an NGO plans an important programme for children in any country, even an industrialized country, there should be some contact with UNICEF; that UNICEF should be aware of the proposal and a real dialogue should ensue. The project may tie in with one of UNICEF's projects, perhaps UNICEF can help in some way, perhaps the plan should be altered. I also think, contrary to the views of some NGOs, that we have to keep in close touch with the people of the UNICEF office and not just make great statements at the Executive Board, very pretentious declarations: "We shall do that, we are able to do this, etc." It is in friendly dialogues and conversations that you can be most efficient. (In this connection, please see my letter of 18 August 1983 to Alba Zizzamia, see Annex)

NGO/UNICEF cooperation in the field

Marks: Very good. Now, in addition to exchange of information, do you share my view about the possibilities of closer operation in the field on actual projects between UNICEF and NGOs? We have talked about Headquarters relations but you have not said much about NGO cooperation with the UNICEF field offices and the possibilities for joint action that lie there.

Moerman: At least in Geneva they are convinced that there should be good relations at local, national or regional levels. Unfortunately I believe, for reasons which I can explain later, that not all of UNICEF's regional directors and country representatives see it that way. I met with Mr. Grant two weeks ago about it and told him that it is all right to have decentralisation; in principle it should increase the efficiency of UNICEF; but there should at least be common guidelines which are respected by UNICEF regional and national directors. I said it very frankly because with Jim Grant we can say some things officers of UNICEF can hardly say themselves. It is not enough to decide in New York that regional directors should be cooperative and then give them so much independence that they can ignore the guidelines which come from New York.

Support needed for small local initiatives

Another reason this cooperation is needed is that much extremely useful, positive work is carried out at local level, on local

initiative, by people who find a part of their money locally but need some support from outside. Because these are small programmes, they are not taken seriously into consideration by the big donors, and many of those projects collapse because they cannot find the \$5,000 or \$10,000 needed to accomplish them. I can give an example that I experienced myself so often when I was in Africa. You can find the people to clear the site for a building, to prepare the stones, to make the bricks, to do the actual construction, but they lack the resources to buy the necessary fixtures and appliances that can be found locally. It is useless to have the walls, the doors and the roofing if you don't have these essential elements. Let's say they have invested \$15,000 in time and money, but there is a lack of \$10,000 or even \$5,000 that just can't be found locally. These initiatives usually come from local groups, local communities, missionary stations, etc. that are ignored because they are not all that important. But in fact, the child in the bush inland may benefit more from a small dispensary or a centre for maternal health, etc, than from a big hospital in the capital city. I remember that in one country in Africa, which I know very well, three quarters of the health budget was invested in the hospital in the capital city.

Marks: Instead of in local clinics! Are you talking primarily of the national and local branches of international organizations or purely indigenous groups?

Moerman: Both. For example, in our own project, some 80 percent of our contacts are with people who are not linked at all with any INGO.

Marks: You're speaking of ICCB?

Moerman: Yes. I want to say a special word about an initiative taken by ICCB. I remarked before, that the Year of the Child convinced us that a lot of real efficient good work is done at the very local level by local people, rooted in the place, not just coming for a few years. People who know exactly the needs of the people and do all they can to meet them, whether it is a building, or to have some of their people trained as nurses, or to provide the things children may need or to have better production of local food or clean water, etc. When such projects are initiated by very local groups, they are generally not related to international INGOs and very often have no other support than the local authorities, the mayor of the village, the head of the district or province or the head of the local government. We think that it is an incredible waste of good will and energy if no support is given to them. I have already developed the idea in IYC that we should find ways and means to deal with these initiatives. ICCB is a poor organisation, we have not much money, we are by nature not a funding body but that doesn't prevent us from doing something. We have been preparing this programme of aid to local projects for two years and it is becoming operational this year. When we receive a request for such assistance, we transmit it to a potential donor.

Marks: A request from whom?

ICCB's endeavour to find suitable donors

Moerman: From people who need help. My experience in Africa was that when I needed money I had to go to twenty or thirty donors before I found the suitable donor. People always say the same thing - "it's a very nice project, it's very worthy, very interesting but unfortunately according to our statutes and rules it is not the type of initiative we can support. But we're sure that because of the quality of your project you will find another donor." When you receive twenty times a response of that kind, you lose your courage and may drop the project. My concern was to be able, on receiving such requests from people all over the world, to guide them to a donor who is likely to be interested and do something. So we have built up a list of potential donors, asking each of them what kind of proposal they are willing to support, what things they would not support. On the basis of a questionnaire we sent to donors, we have about twenty to twenty-five potential donors who said they are willing to assist. We don't ask for big amounts; for big amounts people can go to the large agencies. Then, on the other hand, we have a questionnaire we send to people who send us projects, for example, from the Vicar-General of a diocese in Senegal we recently received a very well articulated project. Normally we send off a form asking the name of the project and some details which enable us to check the validity and quality of the project. We then send this information to the donor we think is most suitable and ask him if he's interested. Once he agrees, it is a bilateral transaction between the donor and the beneficiary, and there is no need for our office to be further involved. Donors are attracted because they

know that if they decide to give \$5,000, the \$5,000 goes entirely to the beneficiary; ICCB does not ask 5 percent or 10 percent or 15 percent for its administrative expenses. So the donors are happy. They receive projects which have been approved by a reliable local authority. This may be a person designated by his bishop, or a bishops' conference or a commission for the development of the country, or a commission of local development. We may also ask the UNICEF officer to check the proposal, not because we expect the money from UNICEF (although UNICEF might be one of the donors) but because if the potential donor is aware that the local UNICEF officer has approved it, and has said that it is a worthy project that deserves to be financed, this is an important recommendation. We need such recommendations. This programme became operational in March 1983. Since then, we have been able to send to the Third World Sw Fr. 150,000 which is \$75,000. It is not our money, but it is given because of our recommendation, and this is increasing. We have already found support for projects in Latin America, Black Africa, North Africa, India and the Philippines. We don't exclude poor countries in Europe. We obtained funds for an institution for poor children in the north of Portugal and we have now a request from Greece.

Marks: So you are really making a match, you are bringing two things together? And they might be Catholic projects or completely non-sectarian or Muslim projects?

Moerman: Yes. We have request from all sides.

NGO relations with UNICEF Committees

Marks: Going back to UNICEF, we haven't said much about the UNICEF committees. There are about thirty UNICEF Committees around the world, mostly in Europe. They played a certain part in IYC, you might want to comment on that. But I am particularly interested in what you might think of the development of closer relationships between the UNICEF Committees and the NGOs in the countries where they exist.

Moerman: Here again, it depends on the countries. There are countries where the relations are good, there are National Committees where they are not so good. Relations with Committees are more difficult than establishing good relations between NGOs and UNICEF. The relationship with UNICEF Committees are sometimes difficult because the Committees consider that the NGOs are highly competitive. Indeed, there are countries where the UNICEF Committees think that they are all-sufficient and people should work only with them. On the other hand you have countries that have a very strong tradition of cooperation with NGOs, e.g. countries where you have a Save The Children Fund. The question doesn't arise in those. I think that the UNICEF Committees should have more of an NGO mentality themselves. There are, in my view, too many UNICEF Committees which consider themselves UNICEF in the countries. They give that impression in their letters or when you contact them. That is not nice. UNICEF Committees should by all means avoid utilizing terms which give people the impression that they are a part of the UN, because that creates difficulty for UNICEF. Some NGO people don't

like UNICEF because of the attitude of a UNICEF Committee. UNICEF Committees have a special purpose to create awareness of the role of UNICEF and to raise money for UNICEF and there it is. If you are an NGO, you can play your own role. If you want to cooperate with UNICEF you don't have to go to a UNICEF Committee, you can go straight to the UNICEF office. The spirit is different from country to country. I have the impression, for instance, that the UNICEF Committee in Spain is liked by everybody; it's cooperative with other NGO's, whereas this is not the same in some other countries.

Marks: Do you want to identify any of them?

Moerman: No, I don't want to, but I think Spain is a very good example.

Development Education

Marks: How do you think NGO's can best cooperate in matters such as development education, which is an important focus now with the UNICEF Committees?

Moerman: There I would say the development education unit of UNICEF Geneva could get in touch with national UNICEF Committees and invite them to organize sessions on development education to which the national NGO's would be invited. At these meetings, it should be stressed that development education is not something which is reserved to UNICEF people. They should give the floor to representatives of NGO's who are knowledgeable on the matter, so that people are aware

that although the meeting was convened by the UNICEF Committee, the substance of the meeting concerns everybody. They should not leave the impression that development education is the monopoly of the UNICEF Committee.

Moerman's views on the state of children today

Marks: We've covered a lot of different points here, Joseph. One thing I'd like to ask you, just lifting our heads above the smaller issues - and perhaps some of the important ones we've discussed - how do you feel in general about the state and the fate of children in this very untidy, difficult?

Moerman: To answer that, I have to speak about other things, not only the material situation. I am not sure that the physical situation of the child in many countries is any worse than the situation of the adults. In the near future, developing countries might encounter worse situations, but in general I don't believe that children necessarily suffer more than adults. For this we especially owe thanks to actions such as UNICEF is now initiating, and the fact that so many organizations such as ours are paying special attention to the child. This is perhaps a consequence of The Year of the Child. There are of course serious material needs - food, clothing, shelter - but there is more awareness than there used to be that there are poor children in the world, that a great effort should be made. I am not so sure that children would proportionately suffer more than adults if a catastrophe were to occur in the world. There is a kind of awareness that the children

belong to the weak, that they need priority in help and assistance. Of course, this depends somewhat upon the culture, because in some civilized societies children are very much more respected than in others.

But I'm very concerned about the ethical aspects and the behaviour aspects. Children have more difficulty than adults in accommodating the great changes in the world, in the large countries and in the developing countries. Or let's put it another way, children seem able to react only to the revolutionary aspect, the troublemaking aspect of modern society; they have no other background, whereas adults can always refer, more or less, to their ancestral traditions, to their religious background.

I wonder what type of adults will come out of today's children. We have a world where in the different cultures and civilizations, whether it be the North American or the so-called developing countries, secular traditions, and even, I would say, traditions of thousands of years are fundamentally changed as a result of that absolutely unique, new phenomenon which is the technological invasion. And technological invasion has a much wider influence and greater impact than in the technological domain only. It has psychological, educational, philosophical and sociological impacts which make man different. When you have children who are totally unaware of the traditions of their ancestors; who have no knowledge of their traditional religion or the origins of the motivations of their ethical behaviour, one wonders what will be the ethical behaviour - the criteria for the behaviour - of these children when

they become adults. Children who are pure products of a technological situation have no reference for their behaviour to a critique of a non-technological nature

We know already of an immense increase in violence; an increase in what I call gratuitous violence - violence without reason. When there is violence in a war, and both sides know exactly why they are fighting, and for which side they are fighting, it's different. I'm more concerned about the gratuitous fighting - mindless violence; to destroy a window - not even to steal; to break the lamps in the street; mar the public transportation system, etc. That's the activity of kids, sometimes of adolescents, but what will come out of them when they are adults? They have no reason behind their actions, and when you speak to them they are astonished that you don't like it. They say, "why not." This mindless physical violence is also reflected in their social behaviour - respect for other people, respect for life. Let's take my own country, Belgium, where there used to be an average of two murders every three days before the war. We now have six or seven murders a day, and it still increases; in most countries the rate of murders and suicides is on the increase. If two-thirds of the areas in a big city, once it's dark, are no longer safe, it's a calamity for mankind. What kind of mankind are we? We can no longer walk when it's dark in our cities which are the centers of civilization and technology. I think that there we have an immense problem and that all forces, churches, (which are in a very difficult situation), the non-Christian agencies; academics; universities and all the agencies of the UN system

should work together to establish a kind of natural morality and sound motivation for human behaviour. I consider that a major task for modern mankind. This is, to me, one of the most urgent things to be done by mankind if we don't want to have permanent violence and destruction of all values in life, in the broader sense of the word, cultural life, physical life, etc. I would like to see more attention given in the programmes of UNICEF, and in the reports of the Executive Director, to these non-physical aspects of the problems of the children.

Marks: Thank you very much, Joseph. I think you've admirably and eloquently expressed your thoughts. I believe your statement and some of the insights you've given us will have an important place in history, certainly in the IYC chapter of it. Thanks again.

Moerman: Thank you.

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