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Interview with Dr. Hans Konzett
Conducted by Edward B. Marks in Zurich
on 26 October 1983

CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS/1996-0023

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Interview with Dr. Hans Konzett
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Greeting Cards

Committee retention

Marks: Hans, I know you have had a rich experience with the Greeting Cards Programme going back over a long time. Do you recall the origin of the retention principle? How was this principle evolved and what has been your experience with it over the years?

Konzett: The percentage we can keep?

Marks: Yes, do you feel that this has developed in a good way, is it equitable? Do you favour a fixed percentage? Does it sufficiently take into account the fact, that in one committee, for example, you may have a very profitable operation and therefore they would be able to retain a lot, but another committee which has more difficulty may sometimes require a higher retention percentage. Now, what is the principle of the Swiss Committee which is always successful in returning the largest possible amount to UNICEF as far as I know?

Konzett: Here we must be quite clear. We have, on the Greeting Cards, a retention of 25 percent for the Committee. Now this 25 percent is not only used for the running of the Greeting Cards operation, but also for our public information, material we have to produce, and all the other things we do. As I said once at the annual meeting in New York of the U.S. Committee, UNICEF is one happy organization, that all the public relations positions all over the world must be paid for out of UNICEF funds. To finance the Greeting Cards Operation alone, we would not require the full 25 percent. But if you look at all the other things the national committee is doing, public relations and things like development education, there are additional costs which have to come from this 25 percent. Of course, we also get some money from fundraising. But we started with the greeting card operation, that was the first.

Marks: How far back was that?

Konzett: We started in 1959-60. That was the year we started the Greeting Card Operation in Switzerland. Naturally, the first two years we did not make a profit because we did not sell too many cards. We had more expenses than earnings but that was only in the first two years. Afterwards, we made a big jump and then as the programme developed, in slow stages, we were able to get into public relations.

Cards as public relations involvement

Marks: Do you feel that the cards themselves are an instrument in public relations?

Conzett: Absolutely. I think that is a very important question. I always have said that each card which is sent to somebody is an ambassador for UNICEF and that is very, very important. You can see today everybody has the feeling, they get the message of UNICEF. As well as a greeting from a friend, or something like that .

Text on back of cards

Marks: What do you think of the amount of writing, the amount of identification with UNICEF that is on the back of the card? Do you think that it's about right or do you think that one might use the cards to say perhaps a little more?

Conzett: One must be very, very careful. I don't think that we should put too much information on the greeting cards. The principal thing is the message one friend sends to another. They know well enough that it is a UNICEF card. If we start to include more public relations in the text, perhaps it would seem too much like a business card. A commercial card or something like that. I don't think we should go too far, perhaps we could put in a few words more, but not too much.

Sales outlet choices

Marks: In some countries, in some UNICEF committees, the cards are principally sold by volunteers. Some of the volunteers are in sub-committees, in cities around the country. What has been the experience here through the years? Are you selling mostly through direct mail or through volunteers, or through commercial organizations which have their own greeting cards?

Conzett: We have here quite a clear position. Naturally we have volunteers, we have sales outlets and we also sell to commercial firms. But I always say that sales to commercial firms and stores should never exceed one-third of our sales. Generally business expect a discount of 30 to 50 percent, but we give them only 10 percent which never covers their expenses so we are also asking them for volunteer work.

Another reason I don't wish our commercial sales to amount to more than a third, is that our prices are always a little below those for commercial cards. People have the feeling that our cards are very nice, and they are cheaper than the others and at the same time they have the feeling that we are doing something good. These points have interest for the people. If we sold over a third through commercial firms, then one day we could run the risk that they would ask for a price increase. Of course they have the feeling that UNICEF cards are in competition with commercial cards so they should have the same price at least. So I always say we are not doing that. If we had to lose one-third of our present sales that would be difficult for me but in the extreme case we could stand it. But one-half would be too many. That is the reason why I don't wish to go too high with the commercial organizations.

Marks: I think you are now selling a phenomenal number, about four million cards in Switzerland. How many of those are sold by direct mail, through the catalogue.

- Conzett: By direct mail, 2 million through the catalogue, 1.5 through the sales points and 1 million to business.
- Marks: I see. That makes the 4.5 million. Are you selling a certain number through Swiss Committee volunteers in Lucerne and Berne and so forth?
- Conzett: Not very much. You must understand that Switzerland is a small country, and we can only run from one central office. Naturally, some are sold in the UN in Geneva, but most sales are by direct mail. We send out our brochure and get the orders.
- Marks: So you don't have sub-committees, for example, in the larger cities?
- Conzett: No, that is not necessary.
- Marks: How about for the other purposes of the Committee, promoting information and development education in schools. Do you do that often here, or do you have volunteers who become involved in other locations, who exert local leadership in those places?
- Conzett: We don't do that in connection with the greeting cards. But we have several organizations in different places who work on development education, public relations, naturally to contact publications for publicity purposes, etc.
- Marks: Don't some of the voluntary agencies, the NGOs, the Swiss Agencies or the Swiss branches of international agencies, help in the sale of the cards, and is that an important factor?
- Conzett: No. That is not an important factor at all.
- Marks: Do you foresee any extension of card sales? Are they going up? In some countries I know it has reached a sort of plateau?
- Conzett: That is very difficult to say. We can say we have about six million people in Switzerland and we sell about four and a half million cards. We don't know exactly when we will reach the plateau. I remember ten years ago we said that when we had arrived three million cards, that would be the maximum here in Switzerland. We are now at four and a half million, so it is very difficult to say what is the maximum we can reach.
- Marks: It is like running the mile. They said that we would never break four minutes but the record keeps getting broken. What are the principal sales outlets here. You mentioned the stores. Do you sell through the banks, are you able to use the post office and so on? Have you had traditional partners in this sale? How did it begin?
- Conzett: That is very difficult to say, we started with stationery shops, big stores, warehouses and so on. When sales increased we sent people to the different places to ask if they were ready to help us. Then we looked for more. Here we have taken places in Berne, in Lausanne, in Basle, in St. Gall and so on, all these places we

have looked for and also in the Tessen, the Italian speaking part. But we always tried to keep a certain balance between outlet sales and our card sales through the catalog.

Marks: One thinks of banks so often in Switzerland. Do you have any arrangements with the banks?

Conzett: In certain places, but not everywhere.

Marks: New York is hoping for an arrangement with one chain of banks in particular. And now Jim Grant has asked the Chase Bank to get their branches to sell cards, with our help, I suppose. It is a kind of prestige thing really, isn't it, for some organizations, for some stores to have these cards. People look for them, it is some attraction, it isn't just a nuisance for them, they feel they are doing something, don't you think?

Conzett: Sure. Then, on the one hand, we sent out over 600,000 copies of an attractive brochure. It goes to one-third of all the households in the country. Naturally not all these households send us an order. But we go to warehouses, shops, and say "do you have UNICEF greeting cards"? Our distribution of the 600,000 brochures results in 70, 80, or 90 thousand orders but receivers of the brochure also go to shops to buy. So shopkeepers are a little bit obliged by public opinion to stock the cards. All the same, they lose on our cards, the ten percent we give them never covers their costs.

Marks: Sending greeting cards of course has been going on for many years in Switzerland. Has the sale of UNICEF cards increased or decreased the sale of commercial cards? Has it affected the sale of commercial cards in other ways?

Conzett: We don't have those figures. We don't know exactly. No one knows. We don't know how many commercial cards are sold. On the other hand, they can tell by our reports how many we sold.

Marks: But at least you don't have any problems with the commercial sellers; I mean they don't feel that you are cutting into their market or anything like that?

Conzett: No. We had some discussions once but had no trouble with the commercial sales people.

Year-round cards

Marks: Has the effort to sell the cards year round, not just at Christmas time, been successful here? Do people buy cards for other purposes as well?

Conzett: Oh yes, that is increasing. I was always in favour of year-round cards. We have quite a lot of people buying cards for birthdays, for births, for weddings and for other occasions.

Marks: Just an informal note?

Conzett: Informal notes, without any text, there are all sorts. We started with the all year cards in February and that is always a big success. Otherwise you have cards only for Christmas. People can buy them all through the year for all their different needs.

Production issues

Marks: Is the UNICEF GCO providing its services in a way that is producing what you need in order to increase your sales? I'm speaking both about the production of the cards and the service in providing them and the selection?

Conzett: I would say that here we are nearly satisfied. You are never completely satisfied. It is not possible. You know, when we started in the sixties all cards were being produced in the United States. And the whole transport came to Europe and things like that, and then we have fought quite a lot when we increased our sales to the same point as the United States and Canada. We then asked them to produce in Europe, for it's much easier to get support if they are produced in Europe. Now we are a little bit higher than the United States and that is good. Naturally you can't always prevail, especially now when UNICEF greeting cards are sold all over the world in all different regions, in all different continents, to persons of all different religions. You must always make certain compromise. In Asian countries you cannot sell greeting cards with snow and things like that.

I would say today the production in quality and things like that has very good form, and that was also quite a fight. You know the UN system requires that for every production you make you must have three different bids, and you have to take the cheapest one. I always said that in greeting cards you never can do that because we have to compete against the commercial cards and we have to produce quality and not the cheapest card. I think that is now accepted, at least it is much better.

Marks: Has that battle been won?

Conzett: I don't know exactly how they are proceeding.

Marks: Anyhow, the quality you feel is satisfactory.

Conzett: The quality is nearly satisfactory.

Marks: I know this is something you can judge very well, because of your own work.

Conzett: We always ask for better quality in things like that. And we have to improve in quality, but I would say in general we are 90 to 95 percent satisfactory.

Marks: Now they are beginning to make some cards in the developing countries. If they can keep the quality, how do you feel about that?

Conzett: I think quite well of it. But up to now we have never had a card produced in a developing country. Perhaps they are sold in their own region.

Marks: I think there are some this year from Nepal. Special ones.

Conzett: I don't know about it.

Marks: Brazil was suppose to produce some. Beginning in a small way, if they can be sure of the quality.

Selection issues

Marks: On the selection, of course I am familiar with the operation of the Card Selection Committee, the Art Committee and certain taboos they have. I believe they have widened the criteria a little bit in recent years. In the beginning, there they didn't have cards with religious motifs.

Conzett: When we started, the Art Committee consisted especially of artists and like that. We then asked for National Committee representation and on the Art Committee, as those people were obliged to sell the cards. They had something to say about which types of cards were needed. I think that was near the end of the sixties. I think it's now very helpful that members of National Committees join with other members of the Art Committee going to New York to make the final selection.

Marks: You think that resulted in a more saleable card?

Conzett: Yes, because if you have just artists, they may like a certain card, but whether you can really sell it is another question.

Marks: How do you feel about the religious cards?

Conzett: We need them too. We cannot say that we can take only this kind of card. Our customers, 6 million in Switzerland, have different feelings; we have to satisfy all those who like a religious card, or like a snow card, or like an art card, or things like that. We have to cater to all the different mentalities. We have to give them the possibility to choose a UNICEF card.

Marks: I am not sure if the postal rates have gone up much in Switzerland, I don't think so. But in many countries they have and that seems to be cutting down a bit on the number of cards people send. Do you find this a factor at all, or do people keep up with it?

Effect of postal rates

Conzett: I can tell you better next year, as on the first of March the postal rates go up in Switzerland. For the cards, from 40 cents to 50 cents, 25 percent. The experience we had in the last increase, that was in 1976, was that buyers did not seem to be affected by the increased cost.

Increases in sales; influence of IYC

Marks: Over these years you have been connected with UNICEF and not just in relation to the cards, you must have some personal

recollections, incidents, anecdotes concerning artists, or other human events that may have occurred in these campaigns. Are there any that you specially recall, that might be interesting for the history?

Conzett: I think that most of these I provided in the interview with Tarzie. Naturally one could have quite a lot more anecdotes like that, but I don't think that it's too important for the history.

Marks: Well they lend a little colour and flavour maybe. In speaking of Europe more generally, in the sale of the cards, what were the major turning points in UNICEF's handling of cards and in their sale over the years? Were there special factors which led to the astronomical increase in the number of cards sold?

Conzett: Only one, that occurred about ten years ago. When we combined all the addresses from fundraising and card sales, we had a big increase. In these ten years we went up from under 3 million cards to nearly 4-1/2 million cards.

Marks: Can you trace for me the progression in every few years since the beginning?

Conzett: Well, here are figures on the six last years. We increased every year, but the biggest jump we made was in 1979-1980.

Marks: Do you think that the 'Year of the Child' might have had something to do with that, Hans?

Conzett: Yes. I would say that it helped us make a big jump for us. It helped that UNICEF and the National Committees took the leading position for the Year of the Child. Naturally many other organizations were working with us but because we were the lead agency, we got perhaps a little bit bigger because of public opinion about UNICEF. I would say that IYC made a very big impression and helped us quite a lot.

Marks: In the sale of cards, in general appreciation of the problem, in public information, fundraising, things like that? Do you think that the results of the 'Year' are still apparent here, that is, have you reached a kind of new level?

Conzett: I would say that exactly, because in the Year of the Child we made a big jump. But we have been able to increase every year, and, of course, it is no longer the influence of the Year of the Child.

Marks: No, it would not be any more. We have a Year of the Youth coming up in 1985, but that will not affect us so directly.

Conzett: No, our Committee will be helpful if it is wanted, but we will not be the lead agency in the Year of the Youth.

Objectives of Greeting Card programme

Marks: Gene Canade told me that when they printed up the card drawn by this little Czech girl, they were looking for something which

UNICEF could use for its own card, for its own greetings. It didn't occur to them at the very beginning that this might sell to the public. I wonder how you feel about the objectives of the greeting cards programme? Some people say that the principal thing of course, is to make money for UNICEF; some people say that an equally important reason is to involve volunteers, and now increasingly a third reason might be to provide more information and guidance about the situation in the developing countries. How do you feel about the relative importance of these objectives?

Conzett: I would say that there is a definite connection between public relations and fundraising and greeting cards. We have seen in our Committee that sending out so many cards creates a certain interest in UNICEF. On the other hand, we do public information, we do fundraising, they all have a connection. The cards are a gift to people, they have the feeling UNICEF is here. Let's say it like this: ten years ago, through the greeting card programme, we had about eighty thousand or ninety thousand addresses or something like that. The number increased, but very, very slowly. Then we came up with a big fundraising drive that brought us three hundred thousand addresses. Now we use the addresses from fundraising also for greeting cards, so you see there is always a connection. Ten years ago we had the feeling that the top level would be 3 million. In the last ten years we have got up to six hundred fifty thousand addresses. So there is an influence from greeting cards to fundraising, and from fundraising to greeting cards; each profits from the other.

Fundraising by Swiss Committee

Marks: When did you begin your fundraising?

Conzett: Fundraising really started in the third year in 1961.

Marks: Did you mainly approach the people who were buying cards?

Conzett: No, we had a very nice system. You know, we are a meek country, and at that time, the beginning of the sixties, UNICEF was also meek. So the meek organization came to us and asked if we would collect for UNICEF, with the result that we have organized all the big stores and chains stores and people could buy in each store a one-franc ticket. By this means, we collected, in a short time, about 2 million Sw. francs.

Marks: Was it completely voluntary or did it depend on whether they bought a bottle of milk or so?

Conzett: No, absolutely voluntary. We told them that with this one franc they could provide milk for a child in one of these countries, and so on. That was our big jump.

Marks: Did one company agree to start that with you, or was it all the milk companies?

Conzett: All the milk companies. It was done in all different regions where there were milk companies, and a central organization of milk

producers cooperated. We also got help in most other countries, but it was the central station that organized the whole thing.

Marks: Are you still doing that?

Conzett: No, not any more. That was one action, just one year. That gave us new customers and helped us make a big jump forward.

Marks: When these people gave a franc, did you get their names?

Conzett: No.

Marks: So it did not really add to your list so much.

Conzett: Not to the list, but to public relations. These two million Sw francs that came in represented an enormous quantity of persons who came into contact with UNICEF for the first time. Then we could go forward with our public relations work. It was the first contact of the big masses of the public with UNICEF.

Marks: And that was in 1961?

Conzett: Yes, that was in 1961.

Marks: Well, how did you follow that up with other kinds of fundraising?

Conzett: I don't remember all the actions we took much later. But ever since, we have been able to get much more information to all the places. The newspapers were cooperative.

Marks: Today what are the principal means of raising money outside the sale of the cards?

Conzett: Greeting cards and other products are 4.8 million Sw. francs and fundraising 4.5 million, or a little more, so you see it is nearly in the balance.

Marks: Do you send out appeals for funds? Is that the way you get in most of the money? Does much come in through special events?

Conzett: Yes. We have all kinds of events. Let's take this year. We started in April a campaign for clean water and we have at this moment a little more than 2 million Sw francs. When we send out our yearly report in August we don't ask for money but we put in a postal response and people send us money. Since the middle of August it totals about 1.6 million Sw. francs. In September the greeting card catalogue goes out. Now in November, we send out a calendar and we expect 2-1/2 million Sw. francs or something like that.

Marks: This goes in the mail.

Conzett: To all households.

Marks: And they don't have to contribute.

Conzett: They don't have to, but if they get something that they can use, they generally do something.

Marks: That's very interesting. What do they usually send in, five francs or something like that?

Conzett: I would say from five francs to two hundred francs, that depends, sometimes somebody sends a thousand francs. But the majority, I would say, send between five and two hundred francs. Quite a lot of people send us money. Then we also have emergency appeals, special appeals. Last year Jim Grant asked us to make an appeal for the Lebanon children so we started an action in mid-July and in five to six weeks we had about 800,000 Sw. francs.

Marks: So you hit them about three or four times a year in different ways.

Conzett: You see, if you have a mailing list of 650,000 addresses you must use it. If you don't use it, people will forget you. By this method, we touch these people four to five times a year. So they always know UNICEF is here, UNICEF is here.

Marks: They also get a certain amount of public information in the process.

Conzett: In the process, we tell them everything that is happening in the UNICEF world, what happened at the Board and in the National Committee, so what they read will give them a clear picture.

Marks: You also send UNICEF materials that are produced by UNICEF Public Information?

Conzett: No, not much. That production is in English or French.

Marks: Some things are in German.

Conzett: Not much. We need the information from Headquarters or Geneva but we have to adapt it for our publicity material. We have to tell our Swiss customers it originates from Headquarters.

Use of volunteers

Marks: Would you say just a word more about the structure of volunteers, where they come from, who they are, and how they can help in addition to buying cards or contributing money?

Conzett: We have volunteers who help us in our general work, but the volunteers that I have in mind are much more concerned with education for development. You can see this afterwards in our office. We have volunteers who came prepared with ideas, who produce lessons for teachers, and all that. Here the whole work is done by volunteers. We have quite a lot of teachers, with publications for teachers and things like that. They prepare lessons, collect relevant materials, as an example and test their usefulness. Only then can we start to produce our material. We gives people the idea of development, the concept of UNICEF. Here we have the biggest volunteer brain trust in UNICEF. I think that is right.

Marks: Do you mean here in Switzerland?

Conzett: Yes, here in Switzerland.

Marks: Do volunteers actually prepare lessons?

Conzett: They make the studies, collect the available material and put it together in the form of a lesson.

Development education

Marks: Maybe because I had dinner last night with Jean Vickers, I am very development education-minded this morning. Is it moving along here? Is there, for example, in the schools, a better chance to learn about the problems of children in developing countries?

Conzett: Yes, in the last four or five years, it has developed very strongly. I agree that we invest quite a lot of money in this direction. In my point of view, it represents an education for the customers of UNICEF in the next ten to twenty years.

Marks: In the earlier years, there was not the same emphasis on this. I suppose that you have seen in your period of service a gratifying increase in the knowledge that people have.

Conzett: Yes, but in the twenty-five years we have been working, UNICEF has also gone through quite a change. We started as a milk agency, then we went over to the development much later, and education for development came only in the seventies.

Agreements with Committees

Effect on coordination

Marks: Just a last few questions on another subject that you and I have talked about a good deal, and that is on the National Committees, the agreements and so forth. Do you feel now that the National Committees, your own Committee and the others, as you have observed them have about the right relationship with UNICEF? You recall that when we talked about what should go in the recognition agreements, quite a few of the Committees were angry with UNICEF. They felt that people coming from Headquarters were not notifying them, that the visitors planned press campaigns or other special events about which they were not consulted and so on. On the other hand, Headquarters sometimes felt the Committees were overstepping their bounds and trying almost to look like UNICEF itself. How do you feel about that now?

Conzett: Here I will be quite frank. Just as you mentioned, we had long discussions on this agreement at the end of the seventies. In 1975, 1976 and 1977 we signed the supplementary agreement in 1979. To be quite frank, I have the feeling that neither UNICEF nor the National Committees care too much about the agreement we have. We have to change this if we want the agreement to really work on both sides. If the agreement was effective we would not have the struggles that we have. We wouldn't have trouble with UNICEF

visitors coming unannounced if both sides really abided by the agreement. But they signed the agreement then put it in the file and very quickly it was forgotten.

Marks: So you are saying then that these failures to coordinate are still occurring, that people are still coming without notice.

External Relations Department

Marks: Is there also a lack of adequate cooperation on the public information side or other aspects of the work?

Conzett: Yes. You know that at the Board in May this year, a decision was made on the External Relations Department. I really hope that this Department will work as we intended it. Before, we had two different units, one did public relations, book production, etc., and the other did fundraising. Nobody knew one from the other and so you always had a lot of struggling people, each one doing just as he wished.

I hope that now we have taken this decision the External Relations Department will play the role we really need. We need it on both sides. I have the feeling that this Department will on the one hand pass information from Headquarters to the National Committees, give the interpretation of the Board decisions and things like that, and on the other hand, take information from the National Committees to Headquarters.

I always say that at Headquarters nobody really knows what a National Committee is. They have never observed what work is really done by the National Committees. Just coming to make a visit to National Committees for two or three hours can never give you an idea of what work is done. I hope that now we will really have a change.

Role of European Director

Marks: Well, now that they are centralising the responsibility for Committees in the Geneva Headquarters, perhaps that will give a little more consistency and perhaps they can acquire the kind of knowledge of committee activity that you are talking about.

Conzett: Yes, I hope so too, but I must say that is a question for the Director of the European Office. Since Dr. Siccault, there has been no strong director and I hope very much that Uffe Konig will be able to bring about team work and not just different kingdoms.

Marks: Well thank you very much. You will have a chance to see what this looks like before we make any use of it. I appreciate your seeing me today and talking about it. It's nice to see you again.

Conzett: Thank you.

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