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on
Today's Children = Tomorrow's World

“Le printemps de l'enfance”
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Declaration by the Paris Round Table on Today's Children,
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Today's Children = Tomorrow's World

**"Le printemps
de l'enfance"**



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The most endangered quarter of humanity

The 1980s have been an era of increasing polarization within the world economy - continuing economic growth in some countries, but stagnation, retrogression and rising debt in many others. As a result, the considerable progress made for children and by children in all parts of the world in the decades since World War II has, in many countries, slowed, stopped, or too often slipped back in the 1980s.

In Africa, Latin America and some countries of Asia, the crisis of the economic situation has become a greater crisis of the human situation, especially for children. An additional one-half million children are dying each year in these continents, through the failures - internationally and nationally - to develop, implement and support adequate policies to cope with crisis and debt and the restoration of sustained long-term growth.

In the United States and some countries of Europe, the long period of growth over the 1980s has not prevented the number of children in poverty from rising. The scope and scale of government services have been severely curtailed, just as the need for them has risen.

Every day, 40,000 small children still die, and a comparable number are crippled - two-thirds of which are preventable today through low-cost means. The needs of children always encompass more than can be summarized in a few statistics. In the course of our Round Table, we have reviewed a number of images of children in need: children in poverty - in rich and poor nations alike; children in conflict - in almost 50 countries of the world; children oppressed - by discrimination, racism and repression; children abused and in psychological distress; homeless children, and urban children living on their own on the streets; very young children having to work; children suffering "affluenza" - lacking purpose, and bored; the unwanted child; children

caught in natural disasters; and, of course, the many millions of sick children, disabled children, minority and immigrant children, and the refugee child. But also, more positively, the happy child - the model of what every child should have the opportunity to be, but which is beyond the reach of so many.

Too many children are in peril.

This is more than an issue of "humanitarian" compassion. Widescale death, disability, and illness among children creates a long-term burden upon society and a failure to ensure the strongest, healthiest, brightest human resources for the future of our countries. "A penny invested in children today," noted one among us, "can save 10 cents tomorrow." Of even greater interest is the potential positive return in the future for modest investments today - or, conversely, the lost potential of failing to make those investments.

When we neglect our children, the future is in peril.

Unparalleled opportunity

At the same time, we are aware that potentially the greatest historic advances for children are well within our reach. In this same difficult decade of the 1980s, new technologies and new organizational techniques for protecting the health of children have achieved dramatic reductions in child morbidity and mortality in many countries. New means of social mobilization and of communicating with, educating and motivating parents and families have shown that child-saving knowledge can be brought to even the most remote communities, and have demonstrated their potential in all countries - developing and industrialized. New appreciation of the needs of children and the long-term importance to the health of nations of early investment in children has been demonstrated in rich and poor countries, east and west.

An era of new thinking and new approaches

The entire world is now engaged in an era of re-thinking of accepted norms and systems, approaches and structures. "New thinking" is being applied to economics, social services, political processes, and the inter-relationships of states. Fresh perspectives are also being applied to the environment, with a global consensus emerging that the world must make "structural adjustments" in its treatment of the environment during the next decade. The urgency of making these adjustments arises from our growing realization that the earth's ecology and atmosphere are vulnerable and require constant nurture by society to ensure their survival.

But we may also ask why the same recognition for the need for "special protection" does not yet apply to the most vulnerable of human beings - children? We urge that "new thinking" among and within nations recognize a fundamental principle of human affairs: that any well-organized society must be focussed around children. "Restructuring" needs to add children to its priorities.

In every part of the world, priorities for children need to be brought into thinking and action for the future. The 1990s provide a special opportunity, as goals for a Fourth Development Decade are being formulated.

In Africa and Latin America, ways must be found to give greater place for children's needs in facing the crisis of adjustment, and in the later resumption of economic growth. In southern Africa, racist apartheid and its impact throughout the region brings death, destruction and devastation to millions of children; this must end.

In Asia, with roughly half the world's children in absolute poverty, ways must be found to give greater weight to child priorities in the process of economic growth now underway.

6

In the industrial countries, a new priority for children is needed, to reverse the rise in child poverty when it is occurring, and to tackle the new range of emerging child problems, including drugs, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, inadequate child care for working mothers, and other child support systems, and a psychology of hopelessness and abandonment.

In many of these areas, what is needed is easily apparent, and affordable solutions are readily available. The issue in these cases is not what to do, but whether there is the political will to introduce available low-cost measures. The 7,000 lives now being saved daily as a result of the recent acceleration of such child survival programmes as the expanded programme on immunization, return to breastfeeding, and oral rehydration therapy, could, with the necessary increase in political will, be doubled within two years, and doubled again in the 1990s.

In other cases, such as street children and drugs, solutions are not so clear. How and what to do must receive more attention.

But in all cases, at the core is mobilization of a greater sense of priority and concern - among political leaders and legislators, private organizations and community groups, parents and families.

Action for children in the 1990s

Our Round Table focussed on four particular vehicles for structuring action for children in the decade ahead: the mobilization of leadership; communications for mobilization; development of universal legal standards for the protection of children through the adoption of the forthcoming Convention on the Rights of the Child; and greater attention to the "human face", particularly for children, in adjustment and development policies. These

7

four vehicles can significantly advance our concerns in all regions, all countries, and all communities.

Mobilization of leadership

In many countries, national leaders have taken important initiatives for Child Survival during the past decade. This has helped achieve major increases in priority actions for children, and reduction of infant and child mortality, even at a time of economic crisis and set-back. We are convinced that the personal commitment of national leaders is a prerequisite for further effective, sustained programmes for children; this personal commitment comes more readily when the prevailing climate of opinion makes it good politics to act, and bad politics not to act.

National leaders have also taken their commitment to children to multilateral fora - particularly to regional groupings, such as in Asia, Africa, the Arab States and Central America, and bilaterally between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America.

In this latter context, we appreciate the suggestion which has been made to convene a representative World Summit on Children. We join the two dozen Heads of State/Government, as well as other leaders, media editorials, and others, who have already publicly declared their support for such a meeting. As one of our participants observed: "An issue is not seen to be important unless important people are seen to be addressing it." We believe that the leaders of nations ought to address the issues of child survival, protection and development - and ought to be seen to address them.

A World Summit on Children could:

- help generate the priority, momentum and commitment needed to achieve the realistic and quantifiable UNICEF-

8. WHO goals for child survival and health appended to this Declaration and targetted for achievement within the coming decade:

- advance the legal protection of children by promoting the proposed Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
- advance the priority given to the "human face", particularly for children, in the adjustment and development policies for the decade ahead.

While it is not appropriate for those of us who are not in government service to "appeal" to our Government authorities, those of us who are not in government service call upon the leaders of our own nations to join in supporting the convening of a World Summit on Children, and we particularly look to those national leaders who have already established their leadership roles in behalf of children to take the initiative **now** to organize such a Summit, which we encourage be held within the present year. Its virtually assured success in the name of children could serve as a bridge into further collective action on more complex world problems.

Additionally, the holding of "Summits on Children" and "Summits of Children" at other levels of society, involving leaders from all sectors of society in addition to governmental and political leaders, could mobilize support for national plans of action and genuine national commitment to address the needs of children. Provincial and community leaders could do the same at their respective levels, as should sectoral leaders in such fields as health, education and social welfare.

Communications for mobilization

The mass media are more than just a communication tool. More and more, the media is the cutting edge of society's changing values. The media has helped bring a

9. dramatic change in global sensitivity to international disasters. Many of us recall famines and other disasters of the pre-World War II era which inflicted their devastation without any sense that distant governments or world society had any obligation to act. Thus, the world could ignore such disasters, since most of the public remained unaware until long after the victims were dead. Now, instant communications have ended that ignorance, and with it, the indifference. When the tragedy of African drought struck in 1984, the world responded as soon as pictures of the camp at Korem hit the television screen. The impact of the media is rarely quiet: it mobilizes public opinion, for better or worse; and public opinion mobilizes governments.

Ways must be found to extend that impact to cover not only the "loud emergencies" of drought and crisis, but also the "silent emergencies" which cost the lives of millions of children every year. If the world responds to an Armenian earthquake, why does it fail to respond to the daily deaths from diarrhoeal diseases and other preventable causes - the equivalent of an Armenian earthquake every day? If the world responds to the loud emergency of a Bhopal chemical disaster, why does it fail to respond to the readily preventable silent emergencies responsible for the equivalent of 13 Bhopals every day? The media, on the cutting edge of society's values, must find ways to inform society of the daily tragedies of millions of children's lives. An informed and motivated society, we are convinced, can help diminish this immorality.

We are also encouraged by the very positive role which the media has come to play in empowering individuals with knowledge to protect and improve their own lives. The media has been the communicator of knowledge for parents to use in protecting their children through immunization, oral rehydration, and other Child Survival actions. The media is now the principal communicator of knowledge for people to protect themselves from AIDS, and plays essential roles in such other public health issues as smoking, alcohol and drug

10

abuse, etc. We believe that the media will play an increasingly large role - in both developing and industrialized countries - as the communicator of knowledge for life. We applaud and encourage this assumption of responsibility.

Universal legal standards: The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Two hundred years ago, France gave the world the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Thirty years ago, a nascent United Nations proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, elaborating on the rights of children proclaimed earlier in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year, the United Nations General Assembly is expected to adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would codify those rights into international law. Law alone will not change the world - but enactment of the right laws can set a new basis for action.

A Convention will firmly establish international standards of society's obligations to children. Because ratifying states must also adjust their national laws to compliance with the Convention, this code will bring widescale benefits for children, and will provide children's advocates with highly useful leverage for the protection of children.

We hope for the adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly in 1989, and for its ratification once adopted, and that countries will rapidly conform their national laws to the Convention's standards - a process which, in fact, can begin immediately in anticipation of the draft as reported by the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The earliest compliance of national legislation would allow the earliest possible entry into force of a ratified Convention.

11

Today's Children = Tomorrow's World

Never before has there been such an opportunity to do so much for so little for the world's children - the future, both for our families and our nations. Our morality must march in step with our increased capacity. The needless daily dying, deprivation and exploitation of our children must join slavery, colonialism, racism and apartheid as unconscionable for our world civilization. Children today must be liberated from the oppression of neglect, that they may enter the world of tomorrow as healthy, productive citizens.

Today's Adults = Today's Responsibility

With a sense of honour and privilege to participate in this Round Table, we, the participants, accept our responsibility for building a world in which children can survive and grow. We declare our individual and collective resolve and commitment to the struggle for the survival, protection and development of all the world's children.

Paris, 31 March 1989

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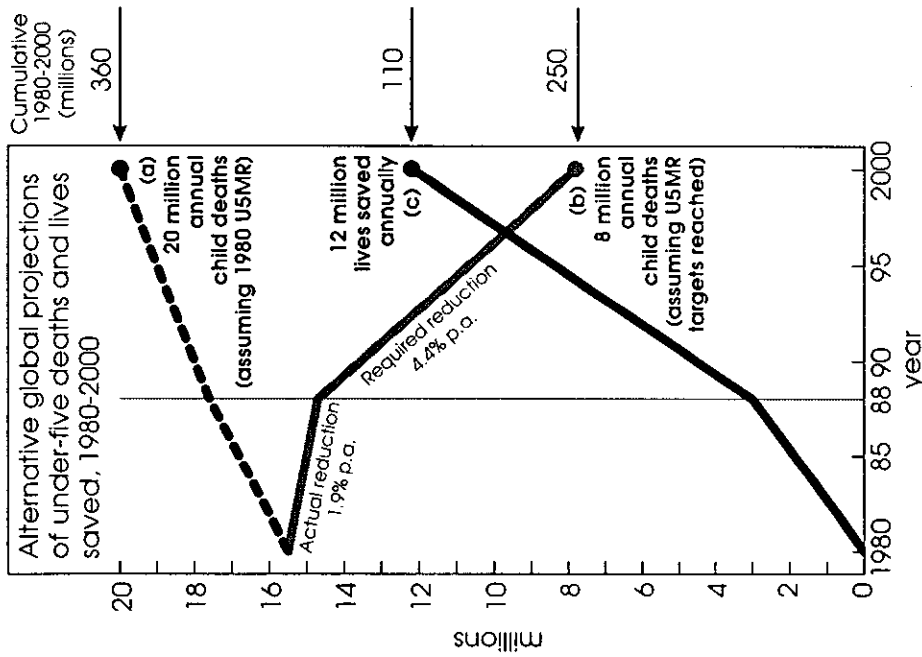
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Saving children's lives 1980-2000

The top two lines on the chart show two possible trends in the annual number of child deaths from 1980 to 2000. The lower line translates the difference between these two trends into the actual number of children's lives which could be saved.



- (a) Assuming the 1980 under-five mortality rate (U5MR) remains the same
- (b) U5MR as estimated by the UN Population Division up to 1988. Thereafter the assumption is that all countries make sufficient progress to reach the U5MR target by the year 2000 (i.e. a U5MR of 70 or half the 1980 U5MR, whichever is the lower.)
- (c) Number of children's lives saved each year if U5MR reduction targets are met. i. e. (a) - (b).

Source: UNICEF, based on latest United Nations Population Division estimates.