



CF/NYH/IRM/RAM/1998-0139

Full Item Register Number [auto] **CF/NYH/IRM/RAM/1998-0139**

ExRef: Document Series/Year/Numb

Record Item Title

Acceptance Speech made by Henry R. Labouisse, Executive Director, UNICEF on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize to UNICEF

Date Created/ Date on Item
10-Dec-1965

Date Registered
13-Feb-1998

Date Closed/Superceeded

Primary Contact **Adhiratha Keefe (Records Management Officer)**
Owner Location **Records & Archive Management Unit =80669443**
Home Location **Records & Archive Management Unit =80669443**
Current Location **CF/RAF/USAA/DB01/2000-00088 > Records & Archive Ma**

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0

Full GCG Code Plan Number
Record GCG File Plan

Da1: Date Published

Da2: Date Received

Date 3

Priority

Record Type **A01 Item Corr - CF/RAI/NYHQ/EPP/RAM was ITD/RAM**

Electronic Details

No Document

DOS File Name

Alt Bar code = RAMP-TRIM Record Number

CF/NYH/IRM/RAM/1998-0139

Notes

~~1978-139~~
Reprint from *file: Nobel Peace Prize* UNITED NATIONS MONTHLY CHRONICLE
Volume III, Number 1, January 1966

. . . The great, the most important meaning of this Nobel Award is the solemn recognition that the welfare of today's children is inseparably linked with the peace of tomorrow's world. . .

Acceptance Speech made by
HENRY R. LABOUISSSE, Executive Director, UNICEF
in Oslo, December 10, 1965
on the Occasion of the Presentation
of the Nobel Peace Prize to UNICEF

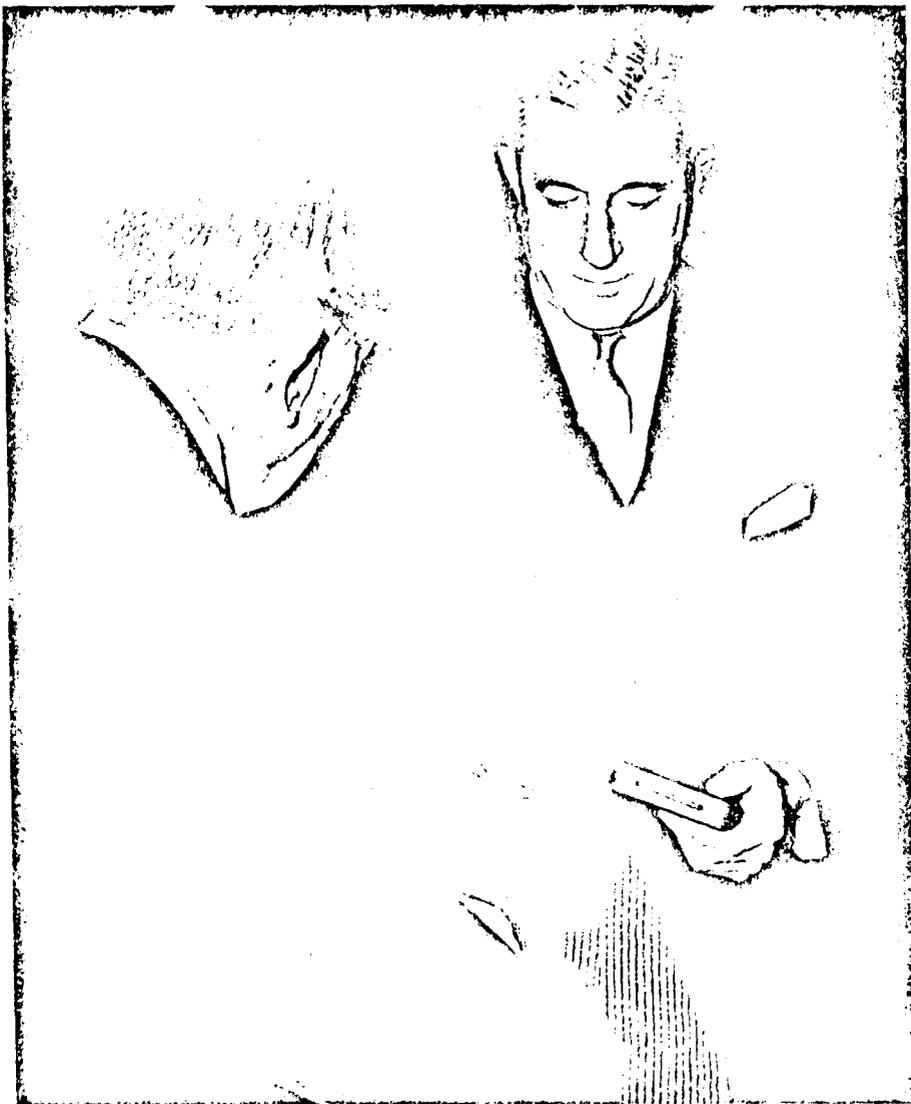
IT IS a great privilege to represent here today the United Nations Children's Fund and, on its behalf, to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for 1965. I speak for the entire staff of UNICEF, and for our Executive Board, in expressing our profound gratitude to the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Storting.

May I also say how very much we wish that my predecessor, Maurice Pate, could be here with us. This great practical idealist was UNICEF's architect and builder. To the work for children, Maurice Pate devoted much of his life, and at that work he died last January, a few months before his scheduled retirement. We miss him poignantly in Oslo today.

Created in 1946 to provide urgent relief for the children of war-ravaged Europe, UNICEF was soon given the task of assisting the children of the developing countries who live in the shadow of disease, hunger, ignorance and poverty.

We know from Alfred Nobel's own childhood what care and tireless effort can mean in enabling a fragile, sickly boy to attain great heights in later life. Nobel's parents succeeded in overcoming the ill fortune which beset their son: everything that could be done for him, was done. He lived, and his name today is associated with mankind's highest achievements.

Had Alfred Nobel been born, not in 1833 but even in 1965, in a steamy, isolated village of Asia, Africa, Latin America, what would be his chances of survival and of success?



Mr. Labouisse receives the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of UNICEF.

The hard reality is that, in more than one hundred developing countries of the world, the odds that confront the average child today—not to say a sickly one—are still overwhelming. They are 4 to 1 against his receiving any medical attention, at birth or afterwards. Even if he survives until school age, the chances are 2 to 1 that he will get no education at all; if he does get into school, the chances are about 3 to 1 that he will not complete the elementary grades. Almost certainly he will have to work for a living by the time he is twelve. He will work to eat—to eat badly and not enough. And his life will, on the average, end in about 40 years.

Such statistics make us face the staggering waste of human energy and talent which—ins, year in, year out, the very nations which need them the most. The developing countries are making a courageous effort to catch up with the industrial one. To them, to us, the word “development” is a symbol of hope; it brings to mind new roads, power plants and steel mills, stepped up production in farming and industry. But development means, above all, people—not numbers of people but quality of people. One of the crucial factors in the progress of a country is the development of the child, the adult of tomorrow—tomorrow’s engineers, doctors, progressive farmers, teachers, scientists, social leaders. That is the great task in which UNICEF is taking a share.

Now, an underprivileged child may benefit from many different things: from a mass vaccination campaign, from improved nutrition, from a new well in his village providing clean water to drink, from a book, from a good teacher in a modernized school, from a small clinic serving his neighbourhood. In its efforts to help meet these needs, UNICEF concentrates on helping governments establish or expand their own services for children. Assisted governments contribute, on the average, more than 2½ times as much as does UNICEF to each given project. Our Agency’s contribution consists of such things as medicines and medical equipment, jeeps and bicycles for public health and community development workers, science kits and other equipment for pilot schools, tools for vocational training, pipes and pumps for village sanitation the stipends to pay for the training of teachers—or of teachers’ teachers.

UNICEF aid comes marvelously alive in the field when you see, for instance, a whole pilot region raising its standards simultaneously in education, nutrition, sanitation and health, with everyone lending a hand, from the local teachers and doctors to the poorest families of the jungle villages—all this with the help of our supplies and of advice from United Nations experts. The “fraternity of nations” that Alfred Nobel, in his will, dreamt to see promoted is truly there in action. On our UNICEF staff we have men and women of 71 different nationalities and, on our Board, 30 nations. One hundred and twenty-one governments contribute on a purely voluntary basis to our budget, and 118 countries receive our assistance while, in turn, doing their share of the financing and of the work. Such world-wide cooperation contributes, in itself, to a better understanding within the family of Men.

But to me, the great, the most important meaning of this Nobel award is the solemn recognition that the welfare of today’s children is inseparably linked with the peace of tomorrow’s world. The sufferings and privations to which I have referred do not ennoble: they frustrate and embitter. The longer the world tolerates the slow war of attrition which poverty and ignorance now wage against 800 million children in the developing countries, the more likely it becomes that our hope for lasting peace will be the ultimate casualty.

It is not just in those countries, of course, but in all countries, rich and poor alike, that we, adults, should constantly ask ourselves: is our society doing, or failing to do, all that is possible to equip our children with the weapons for peace? When our children grow up, will they have trained and informed minds, liberated from the old prejudices and hatreds? Will they trust their own civilization? Will they be prepared to trust and understand others? This is an area way beyond the mandate of our Agency—but not beyond the probing of our own conscience, as individuals.

We of UNICEF accept the Nobel Prize for peace with humility, knowing how little we are able to do and how immense are the needs. We accept it with gratitude towards the governments who are the fountainheads of our financing, towards the specialized agencies of the United Nations that provide us with their advice, towards the national committees, the non-governmental organizations and the very many individuals who give us invaluable support.

The people and the government of Norway deserve our special thanks—for Norway, in 1964, gave us the highest contribution per capita of population of all our contributing governments. We are proud of your interest and your trust.

To all of us in UNICEF the prize will be a wonderful incentive to greater efforts, in the name of peace. You have given us new strength. You have reinforced our profound belief that, each time UNICEF contributes, however modestly, to giving today's children a chance to grow into useful and happier citizens, it contributes to removing some of the seeds of world tension and future conflicts.

