

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF) - FROM CHARITY TO RIGHTS

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Abstract: In 2021, UNICEF marked its 75th anniversary. It was established in the aftermath of World War II in 1946 as a United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, with the aim of providing immediate relief to children and mothers affected by the war. Soon, it became part of the United Nations System, with its mandate extended to address the long-term needs of children and women, particularly in developing countries. After the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, whilst holding on to its initial mission to support assistance and relief to children in need, UNICEF added a rights-based approach to children and entered into close cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body of the said Convention. This paper explores UNICEF's role and achievements in supporting the rights of the child as it works in over 190 countries and territories; its 30 years of cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child; its reliance on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in its main strategies and country programs; and the way this organization communicates the rights-based approach to the States. Namely, the paper seeks to assess UNICEF's ability to shift from a charity-based to a human rights-based approach by perceiving children as right holders rather than helpless recipients of humanitarian support. It finally provides a view of UNICEF's valuable role in the implementation of the rights of the child as the organization constantly balances between politics, cultures, contexts, and the rights that 196 states have guaranteed to all children under their respective jurisdictions.

Keywords: UNICEF, Convention on the Rights of the Child, charity, protection, rights-based approach

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“Human rights are not a matter of charity (...).

Human rights are inalienable entitlements of every human being,
wherever they are and whatever their status.

Navi Pillay, Former High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2011

“Fundamentally, all children and youth are people with human rights
and freedoms of their own, just like anyone else. And this is not because
they are ‘the future’ or the ‘adults of tomorrow’ – as they are often labeled
– but because they are human beings today with human rights today.

CRIN – Child Rights Information Network

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) was established in 1946 as the International Children’s Emergency Fund (ICEF).¹ Its establishment came in the aftermath of World War II as a response to the great suffering of children and their mothers affected by the war that needed immediate relief. In late 1946, the ICEF became part of the United Nations system, with a mandate extended to address the long-term needs of children and women, particularly in developing countries. In 1953, UNICEF became a permanent United Nations (UN) Fund. The words “international” and “emergency” were dropped from the official name, but the acronym has been retained. UNICEF’s initial activities were aimed at providing health support, primarily to reduce preventable childhood diseases and deaths by focusing on projects in water, sanitation, and hygiene. Campaigns to eradicate yaws, leprosy, and trachoma were highly effective. In the early 1960s, UNICEF introduced education programs. In the years and decades that followed, other programs were initiated to support family planning and services in local communities, in particular impoverished ones (UNICEF, 2022a). In 1986, UNICEF announced its new program on children in especially difficult circumstances, shifting attention to children in areas of “armed conflicts and those affected by natural disasters, children in exploitative work situations, street children, and children subject to abuse and neglect”, which marked a shift from pure charity to protection (UNICEF, 2022b). That was the year that UNICEF got involved in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

¹ ICEF was created by the UN Relief Rehabilitation Administration with a view to responding to children’s health needs primarily and without discrimination.

Those activities paved the way for UNICEF to add another layer to its charity and protection missions and move towards an organization that will seek to embrace a human rights approach in its future programming. While UNICEF was slowly moving along the described path, the UN had already developed and set in motion a comprehensive human rights system. The 1945 UN Charter (Article 1, Paragraph 3) proclaims as one of its main purposes “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”. The Charter acknowledges the leading role of the UN in the attainment of these “*common ends*” (Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice). What followed were the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants, and other international human rights treaties that were adopted under the auspices of the UN (OHCHR, 2022a). In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted (OHCHR, 2022b).² That unique human rights treaty reserved a special role for UNICEF, reflecting the belief of the drafters that no other international organization is more qualified to take an active part in the implementation of the rights of the child. At UNICEF’s initiative, the World Summit for Children was convened in September 1990, which happened to be shortly after the Convention entered into force on September 2, 1990. UNICEF did not stop there; in 1996, it introduced two additional protection issues: children without parental care and children in the face of deficient laws and abusive legal processes (UNICEF, 2022c). Together with previously listed areas, those fall under “children in especially difficult circumstances”, which require “special protection measures”. As some authors noted, UNICEF’s language of “protecting children” rather than “protecting the rights of the child” created confusion as to the organization’s understanding and willingness to embrace a rights-based approach to child protection (Cantwell, 2015, p. 39). That remains an ongoing challenge (Vučković-Šahović, 2000; 2015). Despite this protection approach, UNICEF issued a Mission Statement in 1996, which embodied a novel approach to the rights of the child: “UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children’s rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behavior towards children” (UNICEF, 2022d). In its always politically careful language, UNICEF stated

² Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989; entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49.

its determination to be guided by and to work on the implementation of the CRC, but in the rest of the document, the organization sticks to its protection-of-children attire. In 1998, UNICEF adopted a human rights-based approach to programming, placing human rights principles at the center of its work (UNICEF, 2022e). As many authors and contemporaries predicted at the time, the Mission Statement heralded a new era for UNICEF and child rights (Santos Pais, 1999, p. 3). But, did it really? One thing is certain: UNICEF is not and will never be a human rights organization, but it has made significant strides in promoting children's rights. It remains the most valuable organization for children globally. The recognition of and respect for UNICEF are very high. Not only professionals but also children around the world know about UNICEF. The organization plays a valuable role in the implementation of the rights of the child as it constantly balances politics, cultures, contexts, and the rights that 196 states have guaranteed to all children under their respective jurisdictions. But is UNICEF now in need of an in-depth assessment of its ability to shift fully from a charity and protection-based to a human rights-based approach, by perceiving children as rights holders rather than passive recipients of humanitarian support and protection? To what extent has UNICEF managed to adopt a rights-based approach to children while struggling with the overall perception that it is, first and foremost, a relief organization? This paper can only provide some glimpses into the topic by looking into UNICEF's role and achievements in supporting the rights of the child in over 190 countries and territories; its 30 years of cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child; and its reliance on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Considering that most of the literature on UNICEF in the last two decades has been produced by UNICEF, this paper relies to a great degree on the 1990s' lively debates on UNICEF's role in the protection of the rights of the child, as well as on the personal impressions of the author, who has had extensive experience and the pleasure of cooperating with this international organization.³

³ As part of its commitment under the Medium Term Strategic Plan, UNICEF commissioned a Global Evaluation of the Application of a Human Rights Based Approach to UNICEF Programming (HRBAP) in 2011, with the goal of assessing "whether there is adequate understanding of, and commitment to, HRBAP throughout the organization, by elucidating strengths and weaknesses related to the approach, and by identifying good practices and lessons learned in HRBAP to help UNICEF improve future programming".

UNICEF, THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD AND THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

When in 1979, the initial Polish government proposal, in the form of a draft convention on the rights of the child, was submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights, that body requested the UN Secretary-General to obtain comments and suggestions from the UN member states and relevant bodies (Detrick, 1992, p. 21). The Secretary-General received comments from 28 member states, four from specialized agencies, and 15 from non-governmental organizations. Surprisingly, UNICEF did not submit any comments (OHCHR, 2007). The Commission set up an open-ended working group on the Question of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and states and international organizations participated in the process. UNICEF did not show initial interest but finally sent their delegation in 1986. In 1983, a group of NGOs formed an Ad Hoc Group and took active participation in the drafting of the CRC. It is worth noting that UNICEF Geneva, despite not having been involved in the early drafting process, provided logistical assistance by convening an "NGO Consultation" in mid-1983 (*Ibid.*, p. 24). In 1986, UNICEF and the NGO Group joined forces in an effort to expedite the process, requesting the adoption of the CRC by 1989. The UN documents of the CRC drafting process were collected and published and have served as an excellent source through which to analyze the discussions and the issues, including those of controversy, and to understand how different participants fought battles over particular rights of the child as well as over the CRC's procedural arrangements (*Ibid.*, pp. 1-3). This is where one can learn about UNICEF's contribution to the drafting of the CRC as well as how that organization came to hold such an important place in the final text of the Treaty. Once UNICEF experts walked in, their participation in the drafting process was very prominent and they have impacted the CRC provisions in a most positive manner. That activity was a sign of UNICEF's openness towards a rights-based approach. The respect for UNICEF and assumptions that the organization will have a leading role in the realization of the future Convention led to discussion on the role of UNICEF and the scope of that role: from the proposals to set that organization as the CRC's monitoring body, to different formulations regarding the effective implementation and international cooperation in the implementation of the CRC (UN Doc. E/CN4/1987/25). In its final formulation, Article 45 of the CRC recognizes the important role of UNICEF by explicitly mentioning it as a specialized UN entity that "*shall be entitled to be represented at the consideration of the*

implementation of such provisions of the present Convention as fall within the scope of their mandate". Article 45 also states that the CRC Committee may invite UNICEF, specialized agencies, and other relevant UN bodies to submit reports on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities. In paragraph *b* of the same article, it is further stated that the CRC Committee shall "transmit, as it may consider appropriate, to the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies, any reports from States Parties that contain a request, or indicate a need, for technical advice or assistance, along with the Committee's observations and suggestions, if any, on these requests or indications". This clearly reflects the consensus reached during the drafting of the CRC that UNICEF should play a leading role in the promotion of the implementation of the CRC. Now, thirty-two years into the life of the CRC, it is safe to state that UNICEF lived up to the role it was entrusted with by the drafters of the CRC. As indicated in the introduction, the nineties were marked by vivid UNICEF activity in the pursuit of the rights of the child. This was indeed the expected result of the organization's high position in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, so that UNICEF did its best to respond to that task, which is indicated by the interpretation that in the period 1989-2005, it was considered that "UNICEF gathered nations under the banner of child rights" (UNICEF, 2022f). For the period 2006-2020, the organization stated that it was "becoming the leading voice" and "the world's primary voice for child survival and development" (UNICEF, 2022g). On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the CRC, UNICEF stated that it "takes stock of the achievements of the past three decades and advocates for the critical work that remains" and "supports young petitioners to file a complaint with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to address the climate crisis" (*Ibidem*). The rights language and the recognition of the value of the CRC are obvious and were reiterated in its 2020 statement: "Today we continue to work to promote the rights and well-being of children everywhere" (*Ibidem*). Practically all of UNICEF's publications analyzed for this paper contain at least some mention of the rights of the child (UNICEF, 2022h). The CRC and the rights of the child were high on the agenda of the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti in Florence, Italy, established in 1988. Following the ratification of the CRC, a range of research projects at Innocenti contributed significantly to shaping UNICEF's human rights-based approach to development (Himes, 2015, p 10). Its early work in the nineties was to a great extent concentrated on the implementation of the CRC (UNICEF, 2022i). It was Innocenti that initiated an assessment of the impact of the CRC on responses to the situation of children following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, resulting in a review that provided space for broader

discussion on the questions of “protection of children’s rights” (Cantwell a, 2015, p 40). Some years later, in relation to a report from Burundi, Innocenti hosted a discussion in which UNICEF’s role in “protecting rights” vs. “protecting children” reemerged. Namely, UNICEF’s Child Protection Officer in Burundi strongly advocated for a sharp shift of emphasis to the protection of rights, believing that a rights-based approach is necessary for future UNICEF operations in similar circumstances (Majekodunmi, 1999). That suggestion, unfortunately, did not see the light of the day in any subsequent discussions (Cantwell b, p. 41). It is hard to find evidence that any such discussion has been held at UNICEF since the nineties. Thus, even though UNICEF’s protection role has been formally placed within the framework of the rights of the child, it seems that UNICEF still does not place “child protection” under “protection of rights”. The CRC, as an international legal document, clearly lists rights and expects the states parties to protect those rights in laws and practices. However, the CRC’s supposedly biggest ally among the UN – UNICEF – does make a distinction between child protection and protection of the rights of the child. Therefore, a question for UNICEF would be: how does the protection of children differ from the protection of rights? Or, what falls under the rights of the child if not protection? Why make such a distinction at all, unless human rights are to that degree a difficult issue for UNICEF that it still holds to the same old and safe terminology? What makes human rights of children so sensitive in UNICEF’s work is perhaps more obvious in the organization’s field work than in the legal position it holds in implementation of the CRC, its research work, and publications.

UNICEF AND THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The CRC, like all other core human rights treaties, established a monitoring mechanism – the Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee), with a mandate to examine and foster the progress of the implementation of the Convention. Examining progress is defined as follows: “the progress made by States Parties in achieving the realization of the obligations undertaken in the present Convention” (CRC, Art 43). The states parties to the CRC elected members of the Committee as soon as the CRC entered into force, and this Treaty Body met for the first time in 1991. The Committee has 18 members serving in a personal capacity and meets three times a year in Geneva. The Committee deals with monitoring the implementation, interprets the CRC through General Comments, and works on the general promotion and advocacy for the rights of the child worldwide

(OHCHR, 2022c). UNICEF provides valuable support to the Committee's work by supporting governments to implement the Convention and participating in different stages of the monitoring and reporting process. The Committee organizes regular meetings with UNICEF. In 2020, the Committee held its seventh biennial meeting with UNICEF, in which representatives from UNICEF headquarters and Deputy Regional Directors participated, to seek ways to enhance the existing cooperation between the Committee and UNICEF (OHCHR, 2022d). The most well-known monitoring work of the Committee is the review of initial State Parties' reports on the implementation of the CRC two years upon ratification and periodic reports every five years (CRC, Art. 44). To make the examination possible, states parties are required to submit reports timely to the CRC Committee and indicate factors and difficulties affecting the fulfillment of their obligations. The reports should also contain sufficient information to provide the CRC Committee with a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Convention in the country (OHCHR, 2022c). In that process, the state parties' reports are not the only source of information for the Committee. Rather, as stated in the previous chapter, the Committee can invite UNICEF, other specialized UN agencies, and competent bodies, including NGOs, to provide expert advice and to submit their reports on the implementation of the Convention (Vučković Šahović, Doek, and Zermatten, 2012, pp. 335-364). They can also be represented at the consideration of those reports, in line with the scope of their mandate. These provisions ensure a firm legal foundation for the strong cooperation of the CRC Committee with competent bodies, UNICEF and specialized agencies and other UN entities, such as, for example, the WHO, UNESCO, UNHCR, OHCHR, ILO, or others. It is a standing aspect of the reporting process that these stakeholders, in particular national NGOs and UNICEF, submit to the CRC Committee their country-specific reports. In practice, it means that, for each state party's report on the CRC implementation, be it initial or periodic, there will be several other stakeholders' reports. They were initially labeled as "shadow" reports, later as "alternative" and more often as "supplement" or just "stakeholder" reports.⁴ One such report is almost always submitted

⁴ The reports were "shadowed" in times when, in many states, it was highly unacceptable and even risky to criticize the government and to do so by addressing an international body. With the mushrooming of human rights NGOs around the world in the sixties and seventies, and with a better understanding of the values and capacities of such organizations to support societal change and contribute to human rights in a country, confrontations between governments and NGOs have slowly subsided for the most

by a UNICEF country office or a UNICEF National Committee. The Committee reviews on average fifteen to twenty state party reports per year, and there are about the same number of UNICEF supplement information in the same period. This well-established and long-standing cooperation of UNICEF with the Committee is grounded in rights. That is probably the most practical and visible rights-based work of UNICEF, both in Geneva and in the states parties to the CRC. UNICEF country offices support governments in drafting their reports on the CRC implementation while they also support the Committee by participating in the Committee's review of submitted reports. UNICEF works with governments to implement the Committee's Concluding observations, which are recommendations that the Committee provides to the States as a final step in each reporting cycle. In the process of preparation of the state report and other stakeholders' reports, UNICEF helps "to ensure that voices that too often go unheard are reflected in the information presented to the Committee" (UNICEF, 2022j). UNICEF, for example, facilitates consultations at all levels of society and encourages NGOs to submit their own reports to the Committee as a supplement to the government reports. UNICEF country offices are represented at the consideration of the state parties' reports, both in private and public meetings. They are allowed to present their view on the implementation of the CRC in a state party whose CRC review is in the process before the Committee. UNICEF alternative reports are of great value to the Committee since they highlight gaps and identify areas that are deficient in the state reports. Their representatives meet with the Committee in private sessions to present their alternative reports. However, UNICEF country offices' alternative reports are labeled confidential. They are not referred to in any information about the review process, nor do Committee members refer to the source of information during dialogues with the State party. Only the Committee members and the OHCHR staff are privy to them. UNICEF produced a guide for country offices on the submission of alternative reports, but that document has not been published. Therefore, even though it is common knowledge that a UNICEF country office will submit its own "confidential" report and that its representatives will meet with the Committee in Geneva; and even though UNICEF country offices regularly support NGOs and children in drafting and presenting their alternative

part. It is now only a few countries that do not allow human rights NGOs' activities and totally ban them and prosecute their activists. Still, the UN Human Rights Council has a Special Reporter on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders.

reports, their own alternative reports formally do not exist (OHCHR, 2022e). Why is that so? Obviously, human rights of children can have a “sensitive” dimension compared to protection of children and support for their development. Even though UNICEF is reluctant to publish information on its alternative reports, other sources reveal their existence. For example, the OHCHR in its Guide for NGOs and NHRIs describes UNICEF’s role in the CRC reporting process as follows: “United Nations agencies, especially UNICEF, which have country offices in the States parties, often take part in the reporting process”, and “UNICEF field offices generally prepare a confidential written report for the Committee based on what they see as the priority children’s issues in the State under review. At the pre-session, UNICEF representatives, if present, make a brief presentation and respond to the Committee’s questions together with the NGO and NHRI representatives. They often attend the plenary session as observers” (Fegan, R., Myers, L., Theytaz Bergman, L., 2014). However, where there is a UNICEF National Committee, the situation is different as their reports are published, even on the CRC Committee’s website. The confidential nature of UNICEF’s alternative reports on the CRC implementation and the fact that they come from country offices may raise questions about the organization’s full commitment to a rights-based approach to children at the country level.

UNICEF COUNTRY OFFICES AND THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories.⁵ Its work is organized into seven regional and 156 country offices.⁶ In addition, there are 34 UNICEF National Committee countries. Most of the National Committees are in Europe and some are in other parts of the world. They operate as non-governmental organizations that promote children’s rights, raise funds, create key corporate and civil society partnerships, and provide other types of support (UNICEF, 2022k). Country offices operate based on

⁵ The headquarters are in New York City, US. The governing body of UNICEF is the Executive Board, which provides intergovernmental support and oversight to the organization, in accordance with the overall policy guidance of the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

⁶ East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, West Asia, West and Central Africa; <https://www.unicef.org/where-we-work>

agreements with governments, who are UNICEF's main partners. They also cooperate with other international organizations in the country, NGOs, universities, national and international experts, and children. Even though country offices are rather independent in creating their work, they most often have similar main programs: child protection, education, health and nutrition, social policy, and communication. However, depending on the situation in a country, programs can also be more specific, like water and sanitation, or aimed at some issue, such as, for example, the Palestinian Program in Lebanon.⁷ In some countries, UNICEF offices have programs that include, among other issues, monitoring of child rights; one such office is in Serbia.⁸ It would be useful to assess the extent to which the rights of the child guide all those programs, but that would require a separate research based on specific indicators. One of the criteria for such an assessment could be UNICEF country offices' staff - namely to what extent are employees informed about human rights and the rights of the child, and what is their level of influence on programs and their realization. Right after the adoption of the CRC, Innocenti introduced programs aimed at raising the capacity of country offices' staff to apply the CRC and a rights-based approach to their work. As Himes notes, one early dream for Innocenti was that it might eventually become a training centre, a kind of "staff college", but that remains "an unfinished business" (Himes, 2015, p.28). Luckily, in the last three decades, the CRC and international law on children's rights entered classrooms and education systems, so there are many elementary and secondary schools around the world that offer children courses on human rights, civic education, the rights of the child, and the like. Child rights are now taught at many universities around the world, and there are numerous undergraduate and graduate courses.⁹ More and more students that went

⁷ For example, the UNICEF Office in Lebanon states: UNICEF started to work in Lebanon in 1948 and established its office in 1950. For more than 70 years, we've been working closely with the Government of Lebanon, other UN agencies, international and local NGOs, universities, and more than 100 partners to meet the needs of disadvantaged children in Lebanon. <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/what-we-do>

⁸ UNICEF supports national governmental and independent bodies, as well as local self-governments, on child rights and child-centered, evidence-based policy-making, budgeting, and monitoring. We support child rights monitoring by civil society and independent monitoring institutions, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, and others.

⁹ There is even a children's rights academic network, now based at the University of Geneva (CREAN)

through such children's and childhood studies are now working in UNICEF country offices, contributing to their work. Still, most UNICEF staff do not rely regularly on the CRC and their work, be it in health, education, or other country offices' programs, too often does not reflect a rights-based approach. Looking into UNICEF advertisements for jobs, knowledge of the rights of the child and the CRC are rarely mentioned and even more rarely required from the applicants (UNICEF, 2022j). So, if "UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories to save children's lives, to defend their rights (...)", how are the rights of the child defended if the staff is not expected to be acquainted with the CRC? (UNICEF, 2022k). That is certainly an area in which UNICEF should review and rethink its practice. Maybe part of the solution lies in raising child rights knowledge and awareness among country offices' leadership. For the time being, the knowledge gaps are most often filled by the engagement of external consultants, where and when the CRC knowledge is specifically needed, like in the CRC reporting process as well as in the implementation of the CRC Committee's concluding observations. A child rights approach is often highly visible through country offices' work with NGOs, especially those that primarily work in human rights or rights of the child specifically. That kind of cooperation depends on the UNICEF country office and its assessment of the government's attitude towards human rights and child rights organizations. The rights-based approach is also visible in the country offices' programs on education and in their support for the dissemination of the CRC. Child protection programs are often visibly based on rights, especially in relation to justice for children, violence against children, and state and alternative care issues. Despite the above-mentioned shortcomings in relation to the use of the CRC, there has been advancement in the UNICEF country offices' rights-based approach. Still, there is room for improvement and to get the right picture. UNICEF should undertake a thorough study of the issue. That would also fit well with the SDGs and a very clear human rights approach in that UN document, in whose implementation UNICEF has a very prominent role (UNICEF, 2022l).

CONCLUSIONS

UNICEF is an international organization, part of the UN system, and is widely perceived as a relief agency. It would be difficult to deny that hundreds of thousands of children's lives depend on the direct assistance and urgent action that UNICEF has provided since its beginnings. To many, child rights do not equal expediency and aid; some believe that focusing too

heavily on rights slows UNICEF's response in emergency situations. UNICEF is even criticized for placing emphasis on the universal rights of children at the expense of children's immediate needs for survival (Britannica). Such criticism unfortunately does not reflect the fact that any response to the immediate needs of children will always be more sustainable if based on rights and not purely on charity. In such an environment of expectations and pressures, while constantly trying to move fast to respond either to man-made or natural events that threaten the lives of millions of children around the world, UNICEF faces many challenges in holding to its commitment to a rights-based approach. It is fair to note that UNICEF is trying and slowly moving forward in making child rights the basis for all its actions. UNICEF is a one-of-a-kind organization; it has a long and fascinating history, but above all, it has lived through enormous societal and technological changes and has been trying to respond and adjust. UNICEF has been able to catch up and respond to themes that were not on any agendas seventy, sixty, or thirty years ago, such as the effects of climate change and the environment on children's lives. Besides, the area that UNICEF covers in its work is enormous. It encompasses all situations of all children of all ages. Still, there is space and a need for the organization to do more to fully embrace the rights of the child, including in its everyday vocabulary, programming, and action. Although UNICEF has formally adopted a rights-based approach, embraced the CRC and supported its implementation in all states parties, there are still doubts and uncertainties about what this approach should mean in practice, in particular in urgent situations. None of the organizations within the UN system have taken the "same level of proprietary interests in the CRC" (Oestreich, 1998, p. 191) and that makes UNICEF the CRC's best friend. At the same time, UNICEF should fully embrace the CRC as its best friend since that international treaty is the best child rights protection tool available in 196 countries worldwide. Even though a rights-based approach can weaken and sometimes threaten UNICEF's cooperation with states, especially those that often make a show of cooperating with intergovernmental organizations, in the case of the rights of the child and the CRC, nothing outweighs the potential good.

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