

Congressional testimony in support of increased UNICEF funding

Clay Aiken, U.S. Fund for UNICEF National Ambassador

The following testimony — urging Congress to increase the U.S. Government's voluntary contribution to UNICEF for the next fiscal year — has been submitted to the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs of the Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives.



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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony regarding the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). I am Clay Aiken, U.S. Fund for UNICEF Ambassador. On behalf of supporters of UNICEF across the United States, I respectfully ask the Subcommittee to provide \$130 million as the U.S. Government's voluntary contribution to UNICEF for Fiscal Year 2006.

First, I want to thank this Subcommittee for providing \$125 million as the U.S. Government's contribution to UNICEF for Fiscal Year 2005. The bipartisan leadership of this Subcommittee on funding for UNICEF and for international children's issues deserves to be commended.

Supporters of UNICEF's global work for children are encouraged by the Administration's request for an overall increase in international affairs funding for Fiscal Year 2006. We urge you to include an increase for UNICEF's core activities for children as part of this increase.

The well-being of the world's children clearly must be a priority of U.S. foreign policy. Nearly 11 million children die each year before their fifth birthday — about 30,000 children a day — mostly from preventable causes. Four million of them

Clay Aiken delivering testimony on behalf of UNICEF supporters across the United States.

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die in their first month of life.

More than 30 percent of children in developing countries — about 600 million — live on less than \$1 a day. About 150 million children under five — one in four — are malnourished. At least 30 million children in the developing world are not immunized against preventable killer childhood diseases such as measles, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough, tuberculosis and tetanus.

These are among the challenges that have been targeted by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for 2015 and by the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on Children of 2002. In response, UNICEF has adopted a Medium-Term Strategic Plan that commits its resources to securing results for children in the following five priority areas:

- To ensure that every child is fully immunized and receives essential nutrients that protect health;
- To promote integrated early childhood development, ensuring every child the best possible start in life;
- To ensure that every girl and every boy completes a quality primary education;
- To work to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and to ensure that children and young people already affected by the disease are cared for; and
- To work to ensure that all children grow up in an environment that protects them from violence, exploitation, abuse, and discrimination.

Building upon more than 58 years of experience, UNICEF has organized its programs, partnerships, alliances, advocacy work and internal operations around these five organizational priorities. While much work remains to be done, some impressive gains have been realized:

- Immunization efforts supported by UNICEF help to save the lives of nearly 3 million children a year. Today, three out of four children are immunized before their first birthday, which is a dramatic increase from the early 1970s when fewer than 10 percent were vaccinated.
- UNICEF is the largest supplier of vaccines to developing countries, providing 40 percent of the world's doses of vaccines for children and spending \$348 million on vaccines in 2003.
- UNICEF-led efforts have helped protect over 41.5 million women from maternal tetanus, and maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) has been eliminated in 108 of 157 countries.
- In 2002, UNICEF helped protect 10 million Afghan children against measles, and administered doses of vitamin A which is essential to the functioning of the immune system and helps prevent blindness.
- Spearheaded by UNICEF, the World Health Organization, Rotary International, and other partners, the campaign to eradicate polio vaccinated more than 500 million children in 2002.
- Thanks to global efforts by UNICEF, Kiwanis International and other partners, 70 percent of the world's households now use iodized salt, which protects 91 million newborns from iodine deficiency disorders.
- In Afghanistan in 2002, UNICEF conducted the largest education campaign in its history, making it possible for 4 million children to return to school, including more than one million girls.
- In 2002, UNICEF supported programs in 58 countries — up from 30 countries in 2000 — to help parents avoid passing HIV/AIDS to their children.
- UNICEF, the largest purchaser of mosquito nets in the world, spent \$18 million in 2003 on nets and insecticides to combat malaria.

The appropriations provided by this Subcommittee to UNICEF's core resources have helped to make this kind of progress possible. The contributions to UNICEF's regular resources enable UNICEF to be well-positioned in the field to meet the health, education and protection needs of vulnerable children. This makes UNICEF an effective partner for initiatives with the U.S. Government, with other international partners, with non-governmental organizations and with the private sector.

The U.S. Government's voluntary contribution to UNICEF's regular or core resources supports the essential foundation of UNICEF's work and makes it possible for UNICEF to make a measurable impact on saving children's lives and improving the quality of those lives. The funding provided by this Subcommittee is joined by contributions from other donor nations that form the structure that sustains UNICEF's country programs around the world. It positions UNICEF to help the United States in international emergencies and humanitarian crises (such as the tsunami crisis), conflicts (such as in Iraq and Afghanistan), and emerging threats to the well-being of children.

The tsunami crisis in Asia reminded the American people of the value of UNICEF's work for children. And the American people have been generous in responding to UNICEF's appeal for help. To date, the U.S. Fund for UNICEF has received over \$112 million in contributions for the tsunami relief.

The funding UNICEF has received allowed UNICEF's humanitarian relief work to begin immediately and to be sustained. UNICEF's response in the areas impacted by the tsunami has included:

- Emergency immunization to prevent deadly childhood diseases;
- Supply of clean, safe water and provision of basic sanitation;
- Special feeding for malnourished children and pregnant women;
- Care and counseling for traumatized children; and
- Provision of education kits and rehabilitation of schools to ensure the return of children to school as soon as possible.

More than 600 UNICEF staff have been on the ground in affected countries, assisting the humanitarian relief effort and working with local authorities and community-based organizations. Survivors have received over 2,000 tons of UNICEF supplies. As a result of efforts supported by UNICEF:

- Very few children in the affected areas have died from preventable disease — probably the most important indicator of an effective immediate response;
- Up to 90 percent of children have returned to school, most within the first month;
- Most vulnerable communities now have reliable systems for accessing clean water; and
- Almost all separated or vulnerable children are receiving protection, such as shelter, food and clothing, family tracing, and psychosocial counseling.

But the work is not over. UNICEF is dedicated to the long-term recovery of the nations affected. It expects to spend a minimum of \$300 million on this effort over the next three years. This longer-term work will include the restoration of schools, health centers, safe water systems and other essential services that keep children alive and well.

I recently returned from tsunami-ravaged Aceh Province, where I saw utter devastation. Miles of nothing where there once were homes, schools and communities. But that isn't all I saw. I also saw hope and resilience. I saw children learning in schools, whether those schools were tents, or camps or blankets by the beach. I saw computers that had been used to trace missing children being packed away, because most kids have been reunited with relatives or are being cared for in safe environments. And I saw surviving boys and girls returning for the first time to the water's edge, where they sang and danced and started finding their smiles again.

But maybe most important of all is what I didn't see — hundreds of thousands of children dying from water-borne disease due to the contamination of all water sources. I didn't see that because UNICEF and its partners responded to this emergency with speed and efficiency, providing clean, safe water to help prevent outbreaks of disease that could easily have doubled the number of deaths.

It should be emphasized that over one-third of UNICEF's global resources are generated in the private sector. The U.S. Fund for UNICEF works in the United States to help encourage private sector contributions. Our efforts are enhanced through partnerships with a variety of individuals, corporations, foundations and service organizations. UNICEF's innovative partnerships with organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Kiwanis International and Rotary International are examples that are known to this Subcommittee. In this regard, the U.S. Fund for UNICEF supports the funding requests submitted to the Subcommittee by the Vaccine Fund, Kiwanis International and Rotary International. The U.S. Fund for UNICEF also supports the requests for child survival and maternal health advocated by the U.S. Coalition for Child Survival and the Student Campaign for Child Survival.

American advocates of UNICEF's work for the world's children salute the bipartisan support this Subcommittee consistently has provided for child survival and for UNICEF. In view of the budgetary challenges faced by the Subcommittee, we encourage you to continue your historical leadership to ensure that children are a priority of U.S. international assistance programs. We believe that UNICEF is an indispensable partner of the United States on initiatives to save and to improve the lives of vulnerable children around the world.

The United States has secured the appointment of former Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman to be the Executive Director of UNICEF. We look forward to her leadership. She deserves to undertake this responsibility with solid, undiminished support from the United States Government for the work of UNICEF.

We believe that now is the time for additional funding from the United States to strengthen UNICEF's capacity to meet the ongoing needs of children. Helping UNICEF truly extends the reach of the American people in assisting children everywhere. We respectfully ask the Subcommittee to provide \$130 million for UNICEF's regular

resources for Fiscal Year 2006.

Join Clay Aiken and [urge Congress to support a \\$130 million U.S. contribution to UNICEF](#) today.

April 14, 2005