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## **UNICEF Leader's Tenure Marked by Failure**

by Douglas A. Sylva

After 10 years at the helm, Carol Bellamy is leaving UNICEF. Sadly her preoccupation with a "rights-based approach" means that the world-wide organization, which had previously enjoyed a sterling reputation for its service to children, experienced significant failure during her tenure.

Maybe even the United Nations understands - understands that the head of UNICEF, the executive director that Hillary pushed on Bill and Bill pushed on Boutros, has been a failure. How else to explain the lack of fanfare and the silence that has accompanied Carol Bellamy's last week on the job, after 10 controversial years in charge of what was once one of the world's most respected international organizations? Maybe even Kofi knows that there is little in her record to celebrate.

In her own public statements and interviews to mark the end of her tenure, Bellamy appears worn and forlorn, and most especially, defensive. She told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that, "I sure wish that after ten years the world was a better place for children than it was ten years ago. I'm not sure that it is." Maybe even Carol knows that she has failed.

More important, though, is an understanding of why Bellamy failed, and in this regard neither Carol nor Kofi will draw the right conclusions. She failed, first, because she instituted what she called a "rights-based approach" to programming for children.

Her predecessor, Jim Grant, had a much simpler strategy. He assembled his public health experts and asked them two questions: What are the leading causes of childhood death? and What are the cheapest medical interventions that exist to address these causes? He then transformed the UNICEF budget so that UNICEF could save as many children as possible.

Bellamy scrapped this approach. She replaced it with rights, everywhere: conferences on rights, legal advocacy for rights, radio campaigns for rights. It now seemed somehow unacceptable to save a child from malaria, for instance, without first establishing that the child had a right to be saved from malaria.

As a consequence, UNICEF's spending on basic child survival slipped from about 80 percent of its budget to about 50 percent. In response, the British medical journal *Lancet* lamented that Bellamy's "preoccupation with rights ignores the fact that children will have no opportunity for development at all unless they survive. The language of rights means little to a child stillborn, an infant dying in pain from pneumonia, or a child desiccated by famine. The most fundamental right of all is the right to survive. Child survival must sit at the core of UNICEF's advocacy and country work. Currently, and shamefully, it does not."

Bellamy was certainly stung by the *Lancet* article, and in her final press conference she admitted that, with regard to "child survival, this is an area where UNICEF, on my watch, has taken some hits." And in what appears to be her direct, though illogical, response to the *Lancet*, Bellamy said that, "Keeping children alive through the age of five, as morally fundamental as it is, does not mean children will make it to adulthood in a position to fulfill their potential."

Bellamy failed, also, because she examined the plight of children through the prism of radical feminism. This meant, first, that the problems that girls faced received more attention than the problems that boys faced. The UNICEF press release on Bellamy's departure unwittingly captured this very attitude when it claimed that, "Bellamy embraced education of all children, but especially girls." At Bellamy's UNICEF girls and boys were equal, but girls were always more equal than boys.

Her radical feminism also meant that Bellamy used children's funds for women's

programming. Bellamy liked to say that, "As women are the primary caretakers of children around the world, the better off women are, the better off their children are" as the justification for spending money earmarked for child survival on women's issues. She was such a female chauvinist that she argued that AIDS programs should focus on saving women, not men, because, "women are the lifeline of these southern African communities. They put the food on the table, and they're the ones that keep families going during such crises."

Finally, she failed because her radical feminism entangled UNICEF with groups such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in the promotion of abortion, which finally drove away the Catholic Church, which reluctantly pulled its support from UNICEF in 1996.

But Bellamy blames all of these problems on style, not substance: "We are a rights based organization and I think this is the way to go. . . . I think perhaps we don't explain it as well sometimes. I think it's important to recognize that a child rights approach isn't just a soapbox and flailing of the fingers."

But she also says that, "I am the first to admit that I wish we had accomplished more for children over the past ten years." She is certainly not the last.