

Remembering  
**Jim Grant**  
Champion for Children

“*Why are there  
are no longer people  
like this?*”



Remembering  
**Jim Grant:**  
Champion for Children

Remembering **Jim Grant:** Champion for Children



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Remembering **Jim Grant:** Champion for Children

# JAMES P. GRANT PLAZA



JAMES P. GRANT  
UNICEF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
FROM 1980 TO 1995

A CHARISMATIC AND COMPELLING FORCE WHO MADE  
IMPOSSIBLE HOPES AND DREAMS COME TRUE.

Remembering  
**Jim Grant**  
Champion for Children



EUROPEAN CENTER FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT  
UNIVERSITY FOR PEACE EST. BY THE UNITED NATIONS

*Publishers:* **European Center for Peace and Development (ECPD)**  
Terazije 41, 11000 Beograd • [www.ecpdorg.net](http://www.ecpdorg.net)  
The basic premise of the ECPD, which was established in 1983  
is that "development under conditions of peace is only possible  
when conceived as human development".

**OtherNews** • [www.other-news.info](http://www.other-news.info), Roberto Savio

*For the Publishers:* **Negoslav P. Ostojić**, ECPD Executive Director  
**Roberto Savio**

*Editors:* **Editors: Robert Cohen, Paul Hoeffel and Phil Harris**

*Production Manager:* Claudia Diez de Medina

*Designer:* Rosana Toniolo Pozzobon

*Cover photo credit:* ©UNICEF/UNI50268/Pirozzi

*Circulation:* 1000

ISBN 978-86-7236-103-2

Printed by: **graficom|uno**

Belgrade, 2016.

Special thanks to UNICEF New York HQ which kindly allowed us to use its  
photo archive to illustrate this booklet.

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији -  
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

33:929 Грант Џ.(082)  
364:929 Грант Џ.(082)

REMEMBERING Jim Grant : champion for children / [editors  
Editors: Robert Cohen, Paul Hoeffel and Phil Harris]. - Belgrade :  
European Center for Peace and Development (ECPD) University for  
Peace established by the United Nations, 2016 (Belgrade : Graficom  
uno). - 149 str. ; 23 cm

Tiraž 150. - Napomene i bibliografske reference uz tekst.

ISBN 978-86-7236-103-2

1. Cohen, Robert [уредник]  
а) Грант, Џејмс (1922-1995) - Зборници

COBISS.SR-ID 226541580

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# Introduction I

By Roberto Savio

Twenty-one years ago, Jim Grant died.

On his death, there was universal expression of sorrow. The then US President Bill Clinton even signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (which the US Congress never ratified) to pay homage to his memory. No head of an international organisation had ever visited so many heads of state, personalities, academics and other major social and political actors, as Jim did during his time at the head of UNICEF. His amazing activities are well illustrated in the excellent book written by Adam Fifield, *A Mighty Purpose*.

Yet, while travelling round the world for different conferences, I am surprised to see how little reaction Jim's name elicits today. At the World Social Forum, which usually gathers no less than 70,000 activists from different fields of civil society, very few have heard of him. This is the destiny of the unusual men and women who, in the 1970s and 1980s, shaped the agenda on global issues, which until then had been absent from political and international agendas but have now become part of our general awareness.

Another good example is Maurice Strong, the Canadian who was instrumental in calling the Stockholm Conference on the Environment in 1972 that led to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Maurice was its first director, and then again played a crucial role as Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (the "Earth Summit") in Brazil in 1992, which opened up the path that culminated in the UN Climate Conference in Paris in December last year. Maurice died just a week before the Paris conference and was not even mentioned there.

In a sense, the best measure of success is that such issues no longer need a champion ... or do they? After all, the right of the child is no longer just a legal treaty but is considered part of our general view of a better world. During his tenure at UNICEF, Jim



saved 25 million children from death, yet today we still have 16,000 children under the age of 5 who die every day! So Jim has certainly left a void that nobody has filled so far. It is clearly not in the spirit of the times to take on difficult battles or daunting risks. What Jim achieved is a telling lesson for today's world and its political establishment. Here was somebody who took action based on ideals and carried that action forward with ferocious tenacity, making possible what was until then considered impossible, such as getting warring factions to agree to a cease-fire so that children could be vaccinated.

Today, the first call we hear is to be realistic, pragmatic, and Gallup polls have become the limits to imagination. The difference between utopia and chimera has shrunk. Since Jim's time, we have slipped into a world of greed, and we are on the threshold of a world of fear and, according to a general view among historians, greed and fear are what change trends in history.

However, Gallup polls also tell us that young people are disenchanted with the system (in fact, US elections show us that the older generations are also disenchanted), and one of the problems is that they lack idols and human points of reference. A generation without idols is a generation which lacks embodiments of ideals. In an age in which images, tweets and computer pages have become the windows through which the world is observed, symbols have become even more powerful than ever. And it will not be the billionaires, successful stockbrokers and lavishly-paid CEOs who can become idols. Nor will it be politicians intent on administering the possible, while avoiding any risk with the impossible.

When I speak to young people of Jim Grant, they usually remain in silence ... for a while. It is so unexpected for them to come across someone who did so much in his life for humankind, that they struggle to process this fact through their view of the present world, and they have to think it over. They often ask me: "Why are there no longer people like this?" The problem, I tell them, is not that there are no more Jim Grants, there are not many left of his companions in travel who laboriously worked with him to make the children's agenda a central one. The success was a collective success. And then, asking them what they are doing to change the present world if they do not like it, I say to them: "My generation screwed it up, leaving it no better than

the one I found. But this is your world. This is your time!" I believe that, besides greed and fear, fighting for a better world can also change societies and history.

The United Nations is a shade of what it was at Jim's time. To different extents, the great powers have been reappropriating the power that they originally devolved to the United Nations. Would it be possible today to have the United States agree to contribute 25 percent of its budget? Would it be possible today to pass the Universal Declaration on Human Rights as it is? Globalisation has two engines – trade and finance – and they are out of the UN system. Meanwhile, new fora have been invented to shape agendas out of the multilateral system, from the G20 to the World Economic Forum in Davos ... and the same mechanisms are at work in Europe against European institutions.

This is why I took the initiative to publish a short collection of testimonies on Jim Grant from those who worked with him and met him. This is a personal initiative, which I have taken not only as a friend of Jim but because of its symbolic value in today's times. Nine long testimonies were published recently by Other News, but then we collected around 40 short testimonies. There was no editorial policy and those who wrote did so because they chose to do so. The job of putting these contributions together was done by a few "victims", whose names you can see in the editorial team, and many worked pro bono. I want to thank all of them, not only as the publisher of this short book, but because all the work of those who wrote and those who edited brings Jim to life for those who never met him and can now see him through the eyes of his travelling companions.

I am convinced that this collection of testimonies will be a suggestive contribution to focusing anew on ideals and commitments, on the fact that it is possible to change the world if there are those who believe in it and work towards it. The growth of civil society, towards which this short book is dedicated, is possibly the element of globalisation which carries the seeds of a transformation to the better world, to the world which Jim wanted to make reality.

*Rome, March 2016*

ROBERTO SAVIO is an Italian-Argentine journalist. Co-founder and former Director General of Inter Press Service (IPS). In recent years he also founded Other News, a service that provides "information that markets eliminate".



Mike Wilkins, San Salvador Governor, Colette Lasserre Savio, Bert Devaux, San Salvador local leader, Jim Grant, Ellen Grant and Roberto Savio. | Courtesy of Roberto Savio / San Salvador 1994



UNICEF Executive Director James Grant, together with children representing several countries around the world, addresses the Outdoor Forum, held on the North Lawn at United Nations Headquarters on September 26 in celebration of the World Summit for Children. ©UNICEF/UNI51127/Barbour 1990

# Introduction II

By Negoslav Ostojic

The figure of Jim Grant is an historical one. He saved 25 million children, and it would be interesting to find out how many of them are now playing a relevant role in their countries and in the international arena. Of course, this colossal research would be impossible. But it is also impossible to forget that Jim Grant was able to make real the ideals of peace and international cooperation, at a level which made the United Nations a major player all over the world. He was able to organise the first Summit of Head of States, at which dignitaries from over 100 countries convened in New York to engage in a plan of action to save children from malnutrition and death, and secure their survival and education. For the first time, a Convention on the Rights of the Child became an instrument of law, and the fact that then U.S. President Bill Clinton signed the Convention as a gesture to Jim who was already on his deathbed is a powerful symbol of Jim's power of call.

During Jim's life, the world was frozen in the Cold War but Jim was able to transcend that division, bringing all countries together and making the values of international cooperation a reality. He was able to stop the conflicts of that time – some of them intractable – to have children vaccinated everywhere. Jim's was a powerful message: children's lives are linked to peace, wars must be secondary to the survival of humankind. This is a powerful lesson for the world of today, where wars are taking an increasing toll on civilians, who have become a primary target for terrorist action in different parts of the world.

International law as a basis for international relations must again become the basis for global governance. Solidarity must again be the main tool for living together on the only planet we share and where climate control is now becoming the meeting space in which we can find a common language.

The European Centre for Peace and Development was created by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1986. It has

graduated thousand of students on the values of cooperation and peace, even when the Balkans and East Europe, the region in which we are based, has been shaken by conflicts and rivalries. We focus our mission of education and research on the values embedded in the Charter of the United Nations, as well in the constitutions of its member states. Our legitimacy comes from our independence, and from the respect we earned during difficult times. We believe that the values of solidarity, transparency and participation, justice and peace are the imperishable bases for development and for a better world, and we will continue our work of education and research with that vision.

For this reason, ECPD has decided to publish this book on Jim Grant, at the initiative of OtherNews, whose publisher Roberto Savio is also the responsible for ECPD's international relations. The book is not only a commemoration of Jim Grant on the 25h anniversary of his death. Through the testimony of those who worked with him, our intention is to disseminate a message of commitment and hope: commitment to action and hope that the world will change. It is a message for the younger generations that a better world is possible ... if we dream and dare together. In this way, Jim Grant again becomes a point of reference for today's reflections and debates, for vision and action .. also for those who never knew him but feel the need to for inspiration.

This book on Jim will be followed by a book on Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former UN Secretary-General who was Chairman Emeritus of ECPD. Again, it will be based on the testimonies of those who met him and those who worked with him. Under his tenure at the United Nations he was able to produce two seminal documents, the Agenda for Peace and the Agenda for Development, and to hold global conferences on the Environment, Population, Human Rights, Women, and a Summit of Heads of State on Social Issues which had a dramatic relevance for the world. The book will be published on the first anniversary of his death, and will offer another message of commitment and hope, and will show that during the last 25 years there has been a continuity in the quest for global governance based on values and a vision that transcend frontiers and nationalism.

The ECPD is based on those values, and we want to express our commitment to them. We will continue our work, and we see the

embodiment of our commitment in the thousand of our graduates, and in our myriad conferences, seminars and publications.

We hope that the homage we pay here to Jim Grant and will pay to Boutros Boutros-Ghali will be a powerful contribution to enhancement of the vision of Peace and Development, which remain indispensable tools for a world based on international law, cooperation and justice.

NEGOSLAV OSTOJIC is Executive Director of the European Centre for Peace and Development (ECPD).