

# ELEVENTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

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The Eleventh World Health Assembly concluded its 3-week session, under the chairmanship of Dr. Leroy E. Burney, Surgeon General of the US Public Health Service. The Assembly opened on 28 May, after a two-day special session commemorating the Organization's 10th anniversary and was attended by delegates of all 85 active member states, the largest participation in WHO's history. Also in attendance were observers representing the United Nations and its specialized agencies and 32 non-governmental organizations. The following items were highlighted in the Assembly discussions and action:

1. Moving malaria eradication programmes into high gear.
2. A call for greater emphasis on research, towards which the USA contributed a special fund of \$300,000.
3. A comprehensive WHO programme to deal with health implications in the peaceful uses of atomic energy—a USSR proposal supported by the USA and 21 other countries unanimously adopted.
4. Steps taken towards a world-wide programme for the eradication of smallpox.
5. The new WHO field of sports medicine.

The 1959 public health programme, adopted by the Assembly, including nearly 800 projects in nearly every country and territory in the world, also calls for the extension and intensification of the world-wide programme for the eradication of malaria, increased control of smallpox and a general broadening of programmes in the fields of venereal diseases and treponematoses, endemo-epidemic diseases, public health administration, nursing, maternal and child health, mental health, and nutrition. To finance this work in 1959, the Assembly adopted unanimously its largest annual budget to date—\$14,287,600. The Organization is called upon to orient its health programmes more than ever towards a primary objective of WHO—the strengthening of national public-health services.

The *Leon Bernard Foundation* award was conferred on Dr. Thomas Parran, a former Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service. He was chosen, Dr. Burney stated, for his outstanding contributions in the development of the Public Health Service, particularly in expanding national control programmes against venereal diseases, tuberculosis and cancer and for his promotion of large-scale hospital construction throughout the United States. In thanking the Assembly, Dr. Parran proposed that all member states of WHO, in addition to their regular contributions, should take 2% from their annual military appropriations to use as an extra contribution to the UN expanded programme of Technical Assistance, in which WHO would have a substantial share. This, he said, would speed up the eradication

of malaria, followed by smallpox, tuberculosis, syphilis and yaws, permitting WHO to turn its energies to general mental and physical health improvement and 'to the most difficult task of all, the improved harmony of human relations'.

*First Ten Years of WHO.* The Director-General presented a very comprehensive report on the 'First Ten Years of WHO', which reviews the first decade of work in all the major fields of WHO activity since its inception in 1948. The Assembly noted 'with satisfaction the progress achieved in the development of health services, the reduction of communicable diseases all over the world, and the initiation of eradication programmes in certain communicable diseases, notably that of malaria'.

*Survey of World Health Situation.* A new compilation prepared by WHO, covering the period 1954-56, presents for the first time a comprehensive survey of health conditions throughout the world and summarizes the achievements—and the hopes for the future—of the various national health services. It contains descriptions and appraisals of health programmes completed or in progress in 157 countries and territories, embracing some 76% of the world's population. The Assembly asked WHO to prepare a second report covering the ensuing period, 1957-60 for submission to the 1962 World Health Assembly.

## Major Items of Health Programme

*Malaria Eradication.* A significant extension of this work was reported by many delegates, showing that eradication is now under way in 76 countries, embracing nearly one-third of the world's population. It was stressed, however, that much greater international financing is essential to bring to a successful conclusion this first concerted effort to eradicate a major disease from the whole world in a relatively short period of time. So far, a little over \$5,000,000 has been contributed to WHO's Malaria Eradication Special Account, an amount only sufficient to complete this year's programme. UNICEF contributed \$8,000,000 in 1957 and the same in 1958 and has earmarked an equal amount for 1959. UNICEF plans to reduce its contribution after 1959 to \$4,000,000 annually, when strong international assistance will still be necessary. The Assembly authorized the Director General to seek funds for malaria eradication not only from governments, but from all possible sources, including foundations, industry, labour organizations, institutions and individuals. The Soviet Union delegate announced that his government was donating 100,000 tons of DDT to WHO and that the USSR could make available technically qualified experts. WHO was requested to promote further research in the field of malaria, particularly regarding the development of mosquito resistance to insecticides.

*Research.* The Director General was requested to 'organize and arrange for a special study of the role of the Organization in research and of ways in which WHO might assist more adequately in stimulating and coordinating research and developing research personnel'. For this purpose the Government of the United States is making available some \$300,000 to WHO to

set up studies for ways and means by which research can best be promoted.

*Health Aspects of Atomic Energy.* The Assembly showed considerable interest in the health aspects of the peaceful uses of atomic energy and requested the Director General to investigate concrete measures for dealing with this problem. He was called upon to report especially on methods for ascertaining and recording the radiation exposure of individuals from all sources; for determining the relationship between radiation dosage and congenital defects; and for notifying public-health authorities of congenital defects which might be due to radiation. This action, based on a proposal made by the USSR, joined by the USA and 21 other sponsoring countries, opens the way for the Director General to aid under-developed countries in the use of radio-active isotopes in medicine; and for a study to be made on the effect of radiation on human heredity and the relationship of radiation to health in general. In adopting this proposal the Assembly cautioned WHO to avoid any overlapping or duplication of effort with the International Atomic Energy Agency, with which it is to cooperate in the field of health.

*Smallpox Eradication.* The Director General was requested to study the possibilities and the practical implications involved in a universal programme of smallpox eradication, taking into account the financial, administrative and technical factors concerned. Meanwhile, governments throughout the world are urged to continue the fight against smallpox with vaccination and revaccination campaigns, and medical scientists are called upon to work towards the production of improved smallpox vaccine resistant to high temperatures. It was announced that the USSR is donating 25,000,000 doses of smallpox vaccine to WHO, and that the Cuban Government has offered 2,000,000 doses of vaccine annually to the Organization, for the control of this disease.

*Poliomyelitis.* The subject of poliomyelitis control evoked considerable interest. There were reports from a number of countries on the successful use of the so-called Salk killed-virus vaccine, with complaints from some delegates that its high cost prevented its extensive popular use in their countries. Keen interest was shown in the experiments now under way in various parts of the world in polio immunization through the use of the attenuated live-virus vaccine, which is administered orally. The Assembly considered that, at this stage, it is too early to approve or advocate the popular use of the live-virus vaccine.

*Sports Medicine.* WHO has launched into a new field, that of

sports medicine, as the Assembly called for studies to be made in collaboration with the International Federation of Sports Medicine, one of the non-governmental agencies in official relationship with WHO. The studies will include the role of exercise and training in a constructive health programme. There was some opposition to this proposal on the grounds that WHO's budget was too slender for this diversion while infectious diseases and other health problems are so widespread.

#### *Administrative*

*Voting Future Budgets.* The Assembly decided that in the future, WHO budgets must be approved by a two-thirds majority rather than by a simple majority as at present.

*WHO Membership Approaches Universality.* The fact was stressed that, from an initial membership of 26 countries in 1948, WHO had grown to 88 in a decade. From a 1948 budget of \$5,000,000, there had just been voted a regular budget of nearly \$14,300,000, to which was to be added a supplemental \$6,000,000 of UN Technical Assistance funds and nearly \$9,000,000 contributed so far to the special malaria eradication funds of WHO and its regional office in the Americas. UNICEF had also made important allocations of material supplies to the governments concerned. In 1957 the collection of contributions from active member countries reached 97·08%—the highest collection record in WHO's history.

*Executive Board Elections.* Following the elections to fill the place of members whose three-year terms expire this year, the 18-member Executive Board now includes Afghanistan, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Guatemala, India, Iran, Italy, Liberia, Mexico, Tunisia, USSR, United Arab Republic, USA, UK and Viet Nam.

*The Assembly Officers* are as follows: *President*, Dr. Leroy E. Burney, Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service. *Vice-Presidents*, Dr. J. Anouti, Director General, Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon, Dr. A. Sauter, Director of Public Health, Switzerland, and Dr. Tran Vy, Health Minister, Viet Nam. *Major Committee Chairmen*: Committee on Programme and Budget, Prof. N. N. Pesonen, Director General of the State Medical Board, Finland; Committee on Administration, Finance and Legal Matters, Mr. S. Khanachet, Member of the Saudi Arabian Legation in Bonn.

*Next Assembly.* The Twelfth World Health Assembly will meet in 1959 at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.