

PART II

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WORLD HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION



## *The San Francisco Recommendations*

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The events recounted in the preceding chapters show that the will to effective international collaboration in questions of public health preceded by many years the existence of the scientific knowledge needed to make such collaboration effective. The great era of fundamental discoveries in medical bacteriology at the end of the nineteenth century placed new weapons at the disposal of national and international public health, and provided the impetus for the realization of an idea that had long been ventilated—the foundation of a permanent international office of public health.

In its five years of existence before the First World War, the activities of the Office International d'Hygiène Publique (OIHP) were very largely, but not exclusively, focused upon the control of those communicable diseases whose nature had, after centuries of speculation, at last been revealed. The post-war period was one of equally exciting discoveries about non-communicable diseases—notably those which resulted from lack of essential accessory factors in the diet. Once again, newly-discovered scientific knowledge was to make possible and also to provide the stimulus for more effective international health work.

The scientific and technical developments which came to fruition during the Second World War were to carry this evolutionary process still further. It was apparent that two of the most outstanding of the war-time discoveries—penicillin and DDT—had completely transformed the outlook for the control of certain communicable diseases. But it was not only in the traditional province of medical science that great strides forward were made. The intricate apparatus of modern warfare had made increasing demands on the skills and on the mental and physical endurance of the men who had to operate it. Scientists were called upon not only to produce even more effective engines of war but also to study the physiological and psychological factors which influenced the efficiency of their human operators.

The third critical period in the evolution of international public health therefore came at a time when the governments and peoples of the world were

not only animated by the will to rebuild world peace on firm foundations, but also confident that science would provide them with the means to do so.

That this idea was present in the minds of those who attended the United Nations Conference on International Organization at San Francisco in 1945 is clear from a memorandum submitted by the Brazilian delegation in which it quoted a statement by Cardinal (then Archbishop) Spellman that: "Medicine is one of the pillars of peace". It was this memorandum that led to the insertion in the United Nations Charter of health as one of the problems to be considered by the United Nations, and later to the joint declaration by the Brazilian and Chinese delegations calling for the early convocation of a general conference for the purpose of establishing an international health organization. This declaration read:

The delegations of Brazil and China recommend that a General Conference be convened within the next few months for the purpose of establishing an international health organization.

They intend to consult further with the representatives of other delegations with a view to the early convening of such a General Conference to which each of the Governments here represented will be invited to send representatives.

They recommend that, in the preparation of a plan for the international health organization, full consideration should be given to the relationship of such an organization and methods of associating it with other institutions, national as well as international, which already exist or which may hereafter be established in the field of health.

They recommend that the proposed international health organization be brought into relationship with the Economic and Social Council.

Henceforth, the conception of health was to be broadened, and the health of all peoples was, in the words later to be embodied in the Constitution of the World Health Organization, seen to be fundamental to the attainment of peace and security.

The San Francisco Conference approved unanimously the joint declaration submitted by the two delegations and, it being apparent that the essential organs of the United Nations would be established soon after New Year's Day 1946, decided to place the matter in the hands of the General Assembly. The General Assembly was constituted on 10 January 1946; a week later the Economic and Social Council was elected and in being. One of the Council's first tasks was to give effect to the joint declaration and, after debating a draft submitted by the Chinese representative, it adopted on 15 February a resolution in which it decided "to call an international conference to consider the scope of, and the appropriate machinery for, international action in the field of public health and proposals for the establishment of a single international

health organization of the United Nations". The resolution went on to set up a Technical Preparatory Committee—consisting not of States, but of individuals chosen for their expert qualifications—to prepare a draft annotated agenda and proposals for the consideration of the "Conference"; the Committee was instructed to submit its report to the Members of the United Nations and the Council by 1 May 1946. Lastly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations was requested to call the Conference not later than 20 June that year.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, no time was lost in putting the San Francisco recommendations into action, and the schedule set by the Economic and Social Council, short as it may appear, was observed. But this does not mean that the preparatory work was not thoroughly done. On the contrary, the wide range of questions connected with the establishment of the new specialized agency was amply covered within the four months that elapsed between the first meeting of the Technical Preparatory Committee on 18 March and the signature of the Constitution of the World Health Organization on 22 July, two of the signatures—those of China and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—being given without reservation. To what was this rapidity of action due? Partly, no doubt, to preparatory work that had been going on behind the scenes in ministries of health, in the surviving international health bodies and in unofficial medical circles, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States of America during the war, and partly to the excellence of the foundations laid by the precursors of the new organization. But a powerful driving force was the recognition of the need to develop international action in matters of health in the interests of security and peace. As the war receded, however, the pace slackened and nearly two years were required after the close of the New York Conference to bring the World Health Organization finally into being.

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<sup>1</sup> For full text of the Economic and Social Council resolution, see *Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org.* 1, 39.