

## Introduction

*It is difficult enough to recount the evolution of twenty years. It is still more difficult when one is trying to portray in words the gradual development of a comparatively fresh type of human endeavour—not new in the sense of never having been undertaken before but new in the methodology and extent of its application. The fundamental concept of international co-operation in the field of health dates back for more than a century, but the way in which it is applied today through the constitutional provisions of WHO is certainly new, and even the framers of the Constitution surely had not, in 1946, a very clear idea of how the system of decentralization through regional offices would actually operate. Broad ideas were laid down, but how exactly these ideas would work out in practice could only be surmised: certainly their application to over 120 countries through six highly decentralized regional offices was not foreseen in 1946. Of course, there were some patterns from the past, but these were too imprecise to form a basis for the future. The creation of a regional pattern of international co-operation in assistance to health was a challenge to WHO, to bring into being and raise to maturity an infant administration, the future of which was only dimly visualized.*

*For me it was very fortunate indeed to have had the privilege of being the accoucheur, the paediatrician as well as the family physician, of one of the regional offices of WHO—the first, the oldest and one of the most challenging, from the point of view of the size of the populations to be covered—the Regional Office for South-East Asia, generally known as SEARO.*

*The following pages tell the story of the past twenty years of SEARO—its early gropings, its infant's struggles, its toddler days, its adolescence and, finally, its growth to full manhood—during the period from 1948 to 1967. These pages tell their own story, and I shall not try to elaborate here. All our achievements and our failures are there to see.*

*SEARO was founded on the goodwill and collaboration of its Member Governments. With the growth of the Regional Office, the confidence which governments have vested in WHO has also grown. Both in the Regional Committee and in the countries of the Region the closest co-operation and completely friendly relations with our national colleagues have developed. The confidence*

*and trust placed in us by these national colleagues are our proudest achievement. This trust has not been gained by a simple process of fulfilling requests of governments for WHO aid: quite often SEARO has not agreed with the technical soundness or priority of some government requests; yet, always, governments have been ready to discuss technical differences with us, to respect the opinions of WHO and, in mutual understanding, to work out solutions to health problems.*

*As long as the team spirit in which we have been associated with our national colleagues prevails, I am confident of future progress. For me personally these have been the happiest twenty years of my life.*

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'C. Mani', is written above a horizontal line.

C. MANI  
Regional Director