DOCUMENT AL2/P&I/7 (copy attached*), which was presented by the Director-General to the Twelfth World Health Assembly, summarizes the situation with regard to the important subject of holding an International Health and Medical Research Year. This document gives a short history of this proposal and makes certain suggestions with regard to the objectives and the programme for such an International Year; it also proposes a workable time-table and the machinery for carrying this out both nationally and internationally. As will be seen from this document as well as from the discussions at the twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions of the Executive Board, as well as in the Twelfth World Health Assembly (minutes of these meetings also attached*), the main burden of this project will fall on national administrations. The Director-General's document also gives some cost estimates including Headquarters' costs and the cost of provision of WHO assistance to national health administrations in the development of such a project.

The Twelfth World Health Assembly, after considering this whole matter, decided that further consideration should be postponed until the Thirteenth World Health Assembly and requested the Director-General and the Executive Board to continue to study the subject. At the twenty-fourth session of the Executive Board it was decided that Member Governments should be invited to review this question and to give their suggestions. It was also decided that this item should be included in the agenda for the Regional Committees, for consideration at their sessions in 1959, in order to provide an opportunity for a preliminary exchange of views and for clarification of various points involved in national, regional and world-wide plans of action. It was hoped that the discussions in the Regional Committees would give rise to comments and suggestions which would help the Director-General and Executive Board to make appropriate recommendations to the next World Health Assembly.

*Copies of the background information issued at the twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions of the Executive Board and the Twelfth World Health Assembly which have already been sent to governments will be annexed to the present document. A copy of this information is attached to one copy of the document now being sent to each government for ready reference, and more copies will be available at the time of the Regional Committee.
During the discussions at the Twelfth World Health Assembly, five delegations spoke in favour of this proposal, while thirteen expressed their objections or reservations. Those who were not in favour pointed out that the Organization had just embarked on a series of new programmes and that an intensification of activities had already been planned in respect of various subjects, and also considered that research work could not be envisaged for a fixed period. Objections were also raised to the additional expenditure which would have to be incurred on both a national as well as an international scale and which, it was considered, could give better results if spent on operational activities.

While the subject of public health does not lend itself very well to this type of project and while it is true that research cannot be limited to any such short period of time, an International Year could be useful as a device for stimulating public interest. One way of celebrating such a year (whether the "Year" consisted of twelve months or more) might be to hold an international congress at the time of the World Health Assembly, which could be preceded the year before by congresses at the national level, dealing with some aspects of the health programmes in the countries concerned.

Undoubtedly, such a project would involve a very substantial effort on the part of national health administrations in South-East Asia with regard to organization and financing. It is for the Regional Committee to consider whether, in the light of the existing heavy commitments of national health administrations, they would be prepared to put out this additional effort in the immediate future.

A thorough consideration of the question by the Regional Committee is therefore essential in order to bring out substantial comments and conclusions, especially on the following points:

i. Is the Regional Committee in favour of such a proposal in principle, regardless of the duration and the timing?

ii. What should the objective and programme of such a project be? The Director-General's paper makes certain suggestions with regard to these matters (see pages 5 and 6 of document A12/P&H/7).

iii. How can such a project be financed on a national and international basis? As far as WHO is concerned, the Director-General has submitted some cost estimates on page 10 of the document noted above. These estimates are the minimum expenditure which would have to be incurred on such a project by WHO. Are national budgets likely to be provided?