

WORLD HEALTH  
ORGANIZATIONORGANISATION MONDIALE  
DE LA SANTE

FIRST WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

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English

Provisional Verbatim Record

of the

FIRST PLENARY MEETING

Palais des Nations, GenevaThursday, 24 June 1948, at 11 a.m.ACTING PRESIDENT: Dr. Andrija STAMPAR (Yugoslavia)  
Chairman of the Interim Commission

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

1. OPENING OF SESSION BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE INTERIM  
COMMISSION OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND  
WELCOME TO DELEGATIONS AND OBSERVERS.

CHAIRMAN: Fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

Over two years have elapsed since the representatives of more than 60 nations assembled in New York at the International Health Conference and decided - on the suggestion of the representatives of China and Brazil - to establish the World Health Organization. The International Health Conference entrusted to the Interim Commission of the World Health Organization - over which I have had the honour to preside for these two years - the administration of the affairs of the Organization until the first World Health Assembly was convened.

The objectives of the Constitution of the World Health Organization have guided the Interim Commission in its work to promote international health and the attainment of higher health standards for the peoples of the world. A report outlining the Commission's activities and the spirit that guided it has been submitted to the delegations. If you want to render full justice you must bear in mind the whole atmosphere of the Commission's work as well as the means at its disposal.

There are great traditions in the field of international health. The World Health Organization has inherited obligations from pre-existing international health bodies. The Health Organization of the League of Nations held many of its meetings in the halls of this building. The functions of the Office International d'Hygiène Publique were taken over by the Interim Commission according to the Agreement with that body, and work is under way for the integration of pre-existing international health bodies, the objective being to establish one single world health organization, to include everything in the field of international health relations, based on Treaties, Conventions and Agreements.

Although the International Health Conference at New York was characterized by a spirit of true understanding of health matters, by optimism and by faith that the World Health Organization

would become permanent within a short period of time, no less than two years passed before the required number of States ratified the World Health Organization Constitution. The members of the Interim Commission were often impeded in their work by this fact, but they never lost faith in their cause. To-day we see that this endurance has been justified, and the impressive gathering of fifty delegates, representatives and observers attending this Assembly from so many countries and organizations in the world testifies to this effect.

The Interim Commission will terminate its work shortly, and I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to stress one point. During its relatively long existence the work of the Commission was never impaired by any important disharmony, and all differences of opinion were settled by friendly agreement. It rarely proved necessary for the Commission to decide any matter by a vote.

The members of the Interim Commission were conscious that they represented all the countries which took part in the International Health Conference in New York, and they considered it their duty to conduct international health matters in what they believed to be the best possible way, constantly bearing in mind the interests of world health.

With these words it is my privilege to extend to you all, delegates, representatives and observers, a hearty welcome on behalf of the Interim Commission, and to declare the first World Health Assembly open.

We have the honour to welcome also to the first World Health Assembly, M. Etter, Federal Councillor, Chief of the Department of the Interior of the Swiss Federation, representing the country which will be our host during the five weeks this Assembly will last. I further have the honour to welcome Mr. Moderow, representative of the United Nations in Geneva. To the delegates I offer my very best wishes for a fruitful and pleasant sojourn in this city, famous for the role it has played and is playing in international affairs, and have the honour to welcome to the Assembly the Vice-President of the Conseil d'Etat, the Chancellor of the Republic and Canton of Geneva and the President of the Conseil Administratif of the City of Geneva.

With these words, I beg the delegates to proceed to the discussion of the questions awaiting our consideration in that same spirit of mutual trust, friendship and co-operation which animated the meetings of the Interim Commission.

2. ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR OF THE  
SWISS FEDERATION

THE CHAIRMAN: M. Etter, Chief of the Department of the Interior of the Swiss Federation, will address the Assembly.

M. ETTER, Federal Councillor, Head of the Department of the Interior of the Swiss Federation (Interpretation from French):

Ladies and gentlemen: In my capacity as head of the Federal Department of the Interior, which deals with questions of public health, I have the honour to bring to the World Health Assembly the greetings of the Swiss Federal Council. We are very glad that you have decided to hold your first Assembly in our country and we thank you most cordially for this gesture and for the honour which you have thereby conferred upon us. The Republic and Canton of Geneva, which has been for so many centuries the rampart of liberty and humanity, has always been a meeting-place and a centre of international activities. It was the ancient academy of Geneva which, many centuries past, invited students from all countries to come in quest of knowledge and spiritual advancement to its borders. In times of persecution this city was used to open its gates to fugitives and emigrants from all quarters. Geneva was also the centre of the International Red Cross Committee, the conception of which germinated in the heart of one of her sons, M. Henri Dunant, the great philanthropist. You will, therefore, ladies and gentlemen, find in this place a tradition and an atmosphere which should be in every way propitious to your labours. The mission which has been confided to your organization by the United Nations is surely one of the highest and the noblest in the sphere of international co-operation. The health of individuals and of peoples is one of the primary conditions of common welfare and of social progress and well-being. It is, indeed, worth while to exert all our efforts and energies to safeguard such a treasure. One could not offer a better definition of the aims of your institution, and the principles which govern it, than that preliminary phrase which appears in the Preamble of your Constitution - "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

In regard to the programme which has hitherto marked the course of international co-operation in the sphere of health, this definition marks a true revolution, and is an evident sign of progress, for all the organisms which have preceded yours have rather taken the standpoint that the combating of diseases and epidemics was their essential purpose. The World Health Organization has now

assigned itself an aim which is at once more far-reaching and more positive. Its efforts tend not only towards combating dangers which menace the health of the peoples, but more especially towards the development of general health and physical well-being, thus embracing the whole conception of man in his bodily and spiritual aspects. In this way you are marking out a new course towards a vaster and more universal conception.

In seeking to realize this constructive programme by persistent and tenacious efforts, both on the scientific and on the social planes, and also inspired by lofty aims, you are assuming the magnificent task of weaving closer relations between mankind and between the different nations, in the service of peace, and for the welfare of all. Each State, each nation, will be able to take part in this magnificent enterprise, which is universal in its design and also in the opportunity it offers to all peoples of the world. That is implied in the first sentence of the article which also appears in your Constitution "Membership in the Organization is open to all States." Thus, not only the States belonging to the United Nations, but every State in the world will have access to this Organization and be able to co-operate in its labours.

It is with great satisfaction that our country has responded to this invitation. From the very first, Switzerland has followed with close attention the development of the United Nations organization, the aims of which, as set out in the Preamble to its Charter, are in perfect harmony with our own objectives. The foreign policy of Switzerland has always endeavoured in principle to maintain pacific and friendly relations with all States, and to encourage all enterprises which tend to develop international co-operation. It was, indeed, in that spirit that Switzerland, though not a member of the United Nations, examined the possibility of co-operating with the specialized agencies created by the United Nations and that the Federal Assembly, in December 1946, authorized the Federal Council to ratify the Constitution of the World Health Organization, a step which was actually taken in February 1947.

In offering her accession Switzerland was obeying not only an impulse of sentiment but was acting in close conformity with her most cherished traditions; for Switzerland has always recognized the benefits, and indeed the essential necessity, of cooperation between States. May I remind you that it was a Swiss citizen, Dr. Laurenz Sonderegger, who first proposed the creation of an international office at a time when it was considered sufficient simply to convene sanitary conferences. It was only in 1887, at the time of the Health Congress of Vienna, that he was able to make his views prevail, and it was necessary to wait another 20 years - until the Rome Conference of 1907 - in order that this idea should take shape. Since then Switzerland has participated in all agreements between nations related to public health. Our satisfaction is all the greater to find that we are able to continue this tradition as a member of your Organization. If the links which unite our countries are destined to become even closer we should be all the more gratified. Hitherto Geneva has had the honour of offering hospitality to the European centre of your institution, which included the Secretariat and various important technical services. The Interim Commission also, except for its first session, has held its meetings in this city. If your Assembly should decide to appoint Geneva as the central seat of your Organization, we, not only in Geneva, but throughout the whole country, would feel legitimate satisfaction. The Swiss Confederation, as well as the City of Geneva, would rejoice to have the opportunity of offering all possible facilities to the work of your Organization. The Geneva authorities communicated to the Federal authorities recently a plan which provided for the establishment at Geneva of an Institute for Hygiene and Public Health, the character of which was to be not only national but also international. The World Health Organization, according to its Constitution, proposes to direct all research work in the sphere of health, utilizing for this purpose the personnel of its organization and creating appropriate institutions, and also co-operating with official and unofficial institutions belonging to the different member States with the consent of the respective governments. In Switzerland, and more particularly in Geneva, it would be a matter for rejoicing if the World Health Organization should find itself able to take an interest or perhaps even to participate in the activities which this institution will pursue in the international sphere.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the impressive work which has been performed by the Interim Commission we see proof of the energy with which your whole organization will carry out the programme before it. The lofty aims which you have set yourself and the high aspirations of the devoted men and women who have dedicated themselves to the execution of this magnificent enterprise offer us a guarantee of the certain success of your efforts. On behalf of the Federal Council and of the Swiss nation I offer you our most fervent wishes for the success of your Assembly and the World Health Organization in its task of carrying out its work which holds such promise for the welfare of all peoples and the whole of mankind.

CHAIRMAN: We are all happy to have Mr. Etter with us and are very grateful for his encouraging words. I will now call upon Mr. Moderow, Director of the European Office of the United Nations and representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

3. ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS EUROPEAN OFFICE

M. MODEROW, Director of the United Nations European Office:

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, M. Laugier, Assistant Secretary-General, Chief of the Department of Social Affairs, who was due to come this morning to welcome this Assembly on behalf of the Secretary-General, was unfortunately prevented from arriving in time. I have, therefore, the great honour of welcoming you on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I can assure you that the Secretariat of the United Nations are happy and proud that the first General Assembly of the World Health Organization is taking place in United Nations premises. The United Nations organization and its Secretariat have always taken a keen interest in the building-up and future activities of the World Health Organization. Its importance cannot be exaggerated. War devastated not only towns, factories, villages, homes and so on, but also the health of millions of people; and - I should like to emphasize - not only the health of the body but also that of the soul. You face a tremendous task. This was entirely understood from the beginning by the United Nations. The Constitution of the Organization was drawn up, and the Organization established, as a result of two conferences called by the United Nations under Article 62 of the Charter. The first of these conferences, a Preparatory Committee, which met at Paris in March 1946, was called through one of the earliest actions of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations,

at its first session in London. The second was a plenary conference of governments which took place at Hunter College in New York in June and July 1946, when the Interim Commission was set up and the Constitution established with 84 signatures. The Interim Commission was accommodated in this building. I wish to put on record on this occasion how harmonious the co-operation has been between the Secretariat of the United Nations on the one hand - and especially the European Office - and the Secretariat of the World Health Organization on the other from the beginning until this important stage in the building up of the Organization. I am sure the co-operation will continue in the same spirit in the future, regardless of the question of where the headquarters of your organization will be settled. May I also refer to an observation which I personally have made on the occasion of many contacts with the delegates and Secretariat of the Interim Commission? I have rarely noticed such a conciliatory spirit, such a degree of mutual understanding and readiness to contribute to the success of their work as in the case of the World Health Organization Interim Commission. I am sure that the Assembly will be inspired by the same spirit, and I wish you, on behalf of the Secretary-General, full success in your important work.

CHAIRMAN: We all express our thanks to Mr. Moderow for the facilities given in this building by the United Nations. Our Organization is in fact housed in the same building as the Assembly. We are a creation of the United Nations and we are glad to greet here the representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

We have received many messages of welcome, and I propose that these messages should not be read here, but that we should have them multigraphed and distributed to the delegates. Are the delegates in agreement with this? This is agreed.

Several observers have expressed a wish to address our Assembly on this opening day. I propose that the observers should take part in our debates when we discuss item 10 of our provisional agenda.

ADOPTION OF PROVISIONAL RULES OF PROCEDURE

CHAIRMAN: I am sure that all delegates will agree to the following proposal: that we should do our best to constitute our Assembly as soon as possible.

In order that we may do so, I propose that we should provisionally accept the draft provisional rules of procedure for the World Health Assembly, with the amendments as stated in document S.58. The rules of procedure are printed in Part II of the Report of the Interim Commission to the World Health Assembly. Are there any objections to my proposal? The provisional rules of procedure, as printed in our document and amended in document S.58, are provisionally adopted.

5. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE ON CREDENTIALS

CHAIRMAN: According to Rule 17 of the provisional rules of procedure, we have to establish a special Committee on Credentials. This committee will examine the credentials presented by delegates and other members of this Assembly. In order to ensure the proper geographical distribution of the members of the Credentials Committee, I propose that the committee should consist of the following delegations.

I will read the names of the twelve members who will form the Committee on Credentials. Will you please take note of them?

Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Iran, New Zealand, Portugal, Siam, Sweden.

Many delegations have submitted their credentials, but some delegations have not yet done so. After this meeting is adjourned, they should submit their credentials to Dr. Pascua, Room 466, or hand them in at the desk to the right of the entrance hall outside the Assembly Room.

Are there any objections to my proposal with regard to the composition of the Credentials Committee? As there are no objections, I declare the Committee on Credentials established. May I ask the members of the Credentials Committee, after this meeting is adjourned, to go to Room IX and to constitute itself. At 2.30 p.m. this committee should start the examination of the credentials presented.

#### 6. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE ON NOMINATIONS

CHAIRMAN: We have now to establish a Nominations Committee. According to the rules of procedure, provisionally adopted by this Assembly, we have to appoint a Nominations Committee. There are no provisions in the rules of procedure as to how this should be done. Therefore, I think you will not object to the proposal which I am going to make. The Committee on Nominations has to propose to the World Health Assembly, for decision, the candidates for President of the Assembly, for three Vice-Presidents, for five Chairmen and five Vice-Chairmen of the five committees, as established in our provisional agenda, in addition to this the Nominations Committee has to propose six members from the floor of the Assembly. This will constitute a General Committee consisting of the President, three Vice-Presidents, the Chairmen of Committees, and six members from the floor. In order to ensure proper geographical distribution, I am going to propose that the following twelve members should form this very important committee:

Australia, India, Iraq, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Venezuela, Poland, Roumania, South Africa, Ukraine.

Are there any objections to my proposal? If there are no objections I declare that the Committee on Nominations is composed as I have indicated. May I ask the members of this Nominations Committee to meet, after the present meeting is adjourned, in Room X and to constitute itself. This Committee is authorized to make proposals for the election of the President, the three Vice-Presidents, and the five Chairmen of committees and six members from the floor of the Assembly. It is very important for the work of our Assembly to elect a President as soon as possible.

Now comes the question of the Assembly Journal. Is the Assembly in agreement with the proposal that we should issue an Assembly Journal?

There being no objection, the proposal is adopted.

The Administration has arranged for sound-recording, therefore it is very important that speakers should come to the rostrum to speak; only in this way can their speeches be sound-recorded. For our documents, it is very important to have the speeches recorded properly.

Every delegate who wishes to speak is asked to stand up, to state his name and the name of the country which he represents and come to the rostrum to deliver his speech.

We have arranged for an information office here, and I am quite sure that the members of this Assembly will do everything possible to help this information office.

May I now ask that the two committees just established should meet after this meeting is adjourned and constitute themselves; I would ask them to come back at 2.30 p.m., and discuss the questions on their agenda. The Committee on Nominations should propose the candidature for the President of the Assembly by 4.30 p.m., to-day.

The next meeting of the Assembly will take place at 4.30 p.m. to-day. The Agenda will be as follows: the report of the Committee on Credentials, if any, and the report of the Committee on Nominations with regard to the election of the President. May I ask the delegates to be here punctually at 4.30 p.m.?

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.5 p.m.