

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

ORGANISATION MONDIALE
DE LA SANTÉ

FIRST WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

A/VR/12
10 July 1948

English

Provisional Verbatim Record

of the

TWELFTH PLENARY MEETING

Palais des Nations, Geneva
Saturday, 10 July 1948, at 3 p.m.

PRESIDENT: Dr. Andrija STAMPAR (Yugoslavia)

NOTE: This provisional record contains the originals of speeches delivered in English and the interpretations of other speeches. All speeches will be published in the final records of the Assembly in either the original or an authentic translation.

Corrections to the provisional record should be sent to Mr. Richards, Room A.215, within 48 hours of distribution. Unless the issue of immediate corrigenda is expressly requested, minor corrections will simply be noted for the final records.

1. ELECTION OF FRANCE TO CENTRAL DRAFTING COMMITTEE

The PRESIDENT: I propose that France be included on our Central Drafting Committee. Is there general agreement on this?

(The proposal was accepted.)

2. CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION ON THE ELECTION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

The PRESIDENT: The first speaker this afternoon is the delegate of Turkey.

Dr. KARABUDA (Turkey) (Interpretation from French): In the first place I am very glad of this opportunity of offering my congratulations to the General Committee for the very delicate task which they have accomplished and for the excellent efforts which they have made to compile a list which satisfies nearly everybody in the Assembly. Nevertheless, I cannot fail to emphasize the importance of the proposal we heard this morning from the delegate of Switzerland, as it leaves greater liberty of choice to the Members and is of a more democratic character. It is for that reason alone that I support the proposal made by the delegate of Switzerland.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of Liberia.

Dr. TOGBA (Liberia): The list as proposed by the President this morning was very interesting to those of us who had nothing to do with the General Committee's selection. In explaining the conditions under which the selection was made, it came to my mind that, back in 1946, when the selection was being made for the Interim Commission, they spoke of the various continents; but I noticed today that there was not so much emphasis laid on the continents, but rather on those countries which had ratified the Constitution of the World Health Organization. If we are going by that, eventually we shall have to revise the Constitution and add so many more delegates to the Executive Board.

We have eight members from Europe on the basis of the 24 ratifications from Europe. Similarly, from Africa, of course, since there are only three ratifications, naturally we have one member. But the thing that I want to lay emphasis on is that we should pay close attention to what has been suggested to us by the representative of Switzerland. That is, we have not had much time to think of what has been laid before us. We should be given more time to think this problem over and see whether or not some additions or subtractions can be made. I hate to see that in such a great hemisphere as the Western Hemisphere, the Americas have been given such a small place in this Executive Board. I do think that we should think things over - even though we may select members now on a basis of ratification - to see if we cannot make some revision or addition. I am thinking this time, for instance, in terms of Canada. I think Canada has played a great part in the Organization, and one that has so far been successful, as we know, in the person of our Executive Secretary and also other members from Canada. And of course other countries too in the Americas wish to be represented. Of course, I am not an American, but I am simply talking as an observer, as a member of the World Health Organization as well as a member of the Interim Commission.

Now the delegate from Norway explained very nicely today, trying to contradict what was proposed by our member from Switzerland. I do think that we should stop to think that, even although this is not a political organization, yet some of us are trying to make a political issue out of it. I wish you would first take into consideration the geographical areas of the world, that is, that you would take into consideration the continents rather than only those who have ratified the Constitution. Therefore I think that in our opinion we should give the Assembly a chance to think this question over before taking a vote. I do not think that today would be the appropriate time for taking a vote on the issue; rather let us have another week to think it over.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of Italy.

Dr. CONFALONIERI (Italy) (Interpretation from French): The Italian delegation desires to express its support for the proposal made to us this morning by the representative of Switzerland, which allows time for an exchange of views in regard to the composition of the Board. It is a decision which seems not only wise but necessary, especially after the speeches that we have listened to from the representatives of several countries.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of the United States.

Dr. PARRAN (United States of America): As one member of the General Committee, I should like to express publicly my admiration and appreciation for our President for the very judicious and patient way in which he conducted the deliberations of the General Committee concerning the problem that is now before you.

Recalling as I do that a number of hours in several meetings was spent in trying to arrive at a wise decision, I can understand that the forty members of this Assembly who did not participate in those discussions would wish very much to have an opportunity to consider two important questions: first, the specific constitution of the slate which was submitted to you; and secondly, the precedent which is being established of having a slate of just eighteen members presented to you on which you will have the opportunity of voting only "Yes" or "No". In view of these two very important considerations, I would support strongly the suggestion of the delegate of Switzerland. In fact, I should like formally to move that it is the sense of this Assembly that a vote should not be taken today on the election of the Executive Board.

The PRESIDENT: There are no more speakers on the list. Are there any members of the Assembly who would like to speak? The delegate of Greece.

Professor BRISKAS (Greece) (Interpretation from French): Greece agrees entirely with the proposal made by the representative for Switzerland.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of India.

RAJKUMARI AMRIT KAUR (India): I congratulate the delegate of Norway on his clear exposition of the point of view of the General Committee, and I wish to second his proposal that we accept the list which the President has placed before us and about which he gave so clear, so sympathetic and so wise an exposition. There are many factors which have to be taken into account when an election such as this takes place in an organization of this nature, and my submission is that the more we discuss the greater the danger of getting further away from that unanimity which we all desire. It is not always a question of what is legally right, but what is expedient and least likely to divide an assembly such as this. I would have you remember with all the emphasis at my command that unanimity will mean everything to that collaboration which we all desire.

Practically no one apparently objects to the regional divisions that have been placed before you, but the main objection is to the method of election proposed. The other day we all waived legalities when we welcomed the United States of America as a member of this Organization, and I am heartily thankful that we did so. I appeal to you now to show the same spirit, and accept the list presented to you by your President. You have all expressed confidence in him; show that confidence in action and also confidence in the members of the General Committee who, after all, were also unanimously elected by you. I want to assure you that there was no question in the minds of these members to arrogate to themselves any rights that belong to the main body. It was only an honest attempt to facilitate the work of this very body in what is an extremely delicate task, as you have all admitted. In order not to hinder progress in the election of the Executive Board, which needs to be elected forthwith, I plead for a speedy approval of the list. For future elections, after all, the Executive Board may be directed to put up concrete proposals as to methods of election. I am quite sure that this would be statesmanship and I do plead with you all to accept the list.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of Hungary.

M. SIMONOVITS (Hungary): The Hungarian delegation fully concurs in the opinion that it is impossible to find a solution to the question under discussion which would satisfy all parties. I am convinced that the list submitted by the President, and which is the result of careful consideration, can be regarded from all points of view as a very fortunate one. Slight changes might be suggested to the list. I believe, however, that it is very questionable whether such changes would improve the list. On the other hand it is certain that further debates would only disturb the atmosphere of friendly co-operation which has so far characterized the work of this Organization.

The Hungarian delegation is firmly convinced that the success of WHO stands or falls on the question whether or not we succeed in maintaining co-operation based on mutual trust. For this reason the Hungarian delegation considers further debate on this question harmful. We are also convinced that all members proposed by the President to this Executive Board will have the common aim of the Organization, and thus of humanity also, very near to their hearts in an endeavour to promote health and well-being in the whole world. With this conviction the Hungarian delegation suggests that the list submitted be accepted without any changes.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of Poland.

Dr. KOZUSZNIK (Poland): The proposal of the delegate of Switzerland does not contribute at all for us to the solution of this very difficult problem. In the opinion of the Polish delegation it is not only a question of the election of the Executive Board, but also at the same time a question of the future work of WHO. I am sure that these proposals made by our President on behalf of the General Committee should be accepted, because they are the best solution in this difficult situation. I am convinced that the proposed solution has taken all possible factors into consideration.

There are no reasons to postpone the decision on this problem. The geographical distribution of the countries will not change during the next few days. Human nature, the computation of the different nations, will be the same, and the next week we shall be faced with the same difficulties. Therefore the Polish delegation proposes that the Executive Board should be elected to-day.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of Czechoslovakia:

Dr. UNGAR (Czechoslovakia): My delegation is in full agreement with the arguments put forward on the subject in question by the Norwegian and Indian delegates. They were perfect, and there is very little to add.

For my delegation I would like to make a last appeal rather to your conscience and to your hearts - to you, the highest representatives of the health services coming from all over the world. Ever since we started work here in committees the spirit of mutual understanding, of co-operation and friendship, have furthered our common view. Now, for the first time, we are facing something different - a disagreement unknown yet to this Assembly. Do the delegates who are opposing the motion of the President think their work is going to benefit from dissension and dispute? Would the health of their countrymen be better served? The answer must be in the negative. Only the unity of our own endeavours can make the lot of the millions suffering innocently from disease a better one. This is our responsibility. What then are the reasons? On the surface, the objections raised by the Swiss delegate and others were against the mode of procedure. There were reproaches as to a lack of principle in the distribution of the seats on the Executive Board. In our opinion, such reproaches have no justification.

There was a very firmly established principle in the choice of the members: expediency, economy of work and time. The Members were chosen mostly from countries that are actively engaged and experienced in the work of the Interim Commission. As to the manner of procedure, were

there any other democratic principles brought forward by which the Board could become more efficient and more powerful in action? I am afraid the answer must again be in the negative. I venture, for my delegation, to make a last appeal to your conscience, to your common-sense and last, but not least, your compassion for suffering humanity. Do not allow anything but unity to enter into this room. United we can conquer any enemy of mankind. I therefore plead for the acceptance of the list put before us.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of the Ukraine:

Dr. BARAN (Ukrainian SSR) (Interpretation from Russian): I call upon you to accept the procedure for the election of the Executive Board which has already been proposed. The procedure proposed by the General Committee is one which has been tested by experience and reflects a high degree of organization and co-operation and also mutual understanding. The principle on which the proposal is based has been contradicted, but the proposed list for the Executive Board has been chosen according to geographical distribution first of all, while it is also necessary to have experienced members of the Assembly on that Board. Secondly, all our hopes are placed on the Executive Board, and it is obvious that the work of the General Assembly must be based on the work of the Board. This is quite in accordance with the Constitution. Thirdly, the procedure which has been proposed to you is not altogether new. It has already been tested and has given proof of its usefulness, and it shows also a sense of organization, independence and co-operation.

We should not oppose this procedure. On the contrary, we should give proof of our confidence and show the fullest co-operation and mutual trust in the carrying out of our noble humanitarian task.

In New York, in 1946, under the chairmanship of Dr. Parran,

the procedure for electing the Interim Commission was exactly the same, and the success of this procedure is reflected in the work of the Interim Commission. We should not hinder the work of our Organization, but the Assembly should, on the contrary, signify its approval.

The Ukrainian delegation calls upon the Assembly to show its confidence in the President of the Assembly, who was the first official to be elected, and to support the authority of the General Committee and approve the procedure proposed. We must choose the most experienced and most able personnel possible. This has already been proved by the character of the work done by the Interim Commission.

The Ukrainian delegation calls upon those present to support the General Committee, to support the President and to enable the Assembly to carry out its work.

The PRESIDENT: The delegate of Switzerland wishes to speak.

(Interpretation from the French)

M. BOISSIER (Switzerland): One essential object of my remarks this morning appears to have been attained already. I had asked that there should be an opportunity for an exchange of views between the delegations, and I thank the President for his conduct of the proceedings, which has enabled this to take place. Several speakers have made reference to my remarks this morning, not always in exactly the sense in which I intended them. Therefore, I should like to make myself clear, so as to remove any possible misunderstanding. The only substantive proposal that I made was that there should be an adjournment of this question, in order that we might be able to devote careful study to the proposals which had been made. It was not in any sense a criticism of the composition of the list put before us. I would like to emphasize that point with all the energy at my command.

In regard to my other proposals, these were only in the nature of suggestions, which we felt would enable the General Committee to take advantage of any ideas that might be put forward in the interval that was to elapse. If the General Committee, with all its competence and experience, now informs us, through the President himself, that it is not possible to follow the method I have suggested, we would certainly acquiesce in that view and would be satisfied to think that our suggestions had at any rate been considered. We are informed that the General Committee has already examined all the possibilities that we put forward, and if the Assembly, in view of those considerations, believes that there is no necessity for the adjournment, we will accept that decision, hoping, however, that our suggestions in regard to the procedure for elections - which we believe would assist freedom of choice - may be borne in mind, with a view to their consideration. More than any other delegation, the the Swiss delegation supports the principle of unanimity, and would be the last to propose anything that would militate against the application of that principle.

The PRESIDENT: The observer from the Argentine Republic.

Professor ZWANCK (Observer from the Argentine Republic) (Interpretation from the Spanish): As an observer, I do not intend to take part in this debate and merely ask to speak in order to give an explanation. The Ukrainian delegate has just recalled to us an incident which took place during a meeting of the International Health Conference in New York. He said that at that time, under the chairmanship of Dr. Parran, a similar case arose. However, I wish to say that this was not the case. In fact, it was I myself who made the proposal concerning the nomination of the members of the Interim Commission, and it was as the representative of my country, of Argentina, that I made this proposal. The proposal came before the Conference itself; it was discussed along with all the other proposals, by all the members, and I remember that the French delegate also

took part. Therefore, it was in the name of the members of the Conference that I presented this, and it was put to the vote. The President of the Conference took no part in the discussion and did not intervene at all. It was done entirely by the members of the Conference. I want to thank you for permitting me to give you this explanation.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any more speakers? The delegate of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Dr. VINOGRADOV (USSR) (Interpretation from the Russian): First of all I would like to mention my appreciation of the work of the President and the General Committee in trying to find a solution to such a difficult question as the one which stands before us now.

The Soviet Union delegation has taken note of the arguments put forward by many delegates, and is very concerned for the future work and co-operation of the World Health Organization. The Executive Board is to be chosen for one year and the choice of the Executive Board is one of the most important items on our agenda. During two years of co-operation with the Interim Commission we have proved the worth of many active workers, whose work has been characterized by their co-operativeness. The members who have been chosen for the list of the Executive Board include some of those who gave most effort to the work of the Interim Commission. I have in mind Dr. Evang, Dr. Stampar, Dr. van den Berg and several others.

Independent of any geographical considerations, I would support the choice for the Executive Board of those persons who have most proved their worth and their importance for the World Health Organization, and their co-operation and unanimity in this work.

I find it difficult to understand the reasons for the discussions which have arisen today, but as far as I can see some delegates have objected that eight places on the Executive Board have been allotted to Europe.

Supposing I was to say that I was not satisfied with the number of South American countries that had ratified the Constitution? What reply could be given to us? What is ratification? The whole of Europe has ratified the Constitution of the World Health Organization - I would like to stress this fact - and it is therefore necessary to acknowledge it. That means that all these countries have acknowledged the necessity of establishing the World Health Organization. This ratification also means that these countries did not doubt the necessity of the World Health Organization and also that they have trusted the Interim Commission, as we have, at these meetings, trusted the General Committee. Therefore, those who have ratified the Constitution of the Organization must be represented. These two instances cannot be compared. Ratification is a most important factor; it is not a formality, but it means an acknowledgment of and support for the authority of the World Health Organization.

The Soviet delegation is concerned mainly with unanimity and co-operation in our work. Only in the interest of unanimity did the Soviet delegation support the acceptance of the United States of America to the Assembly; and the Soviet delegation is concerned for the unanimity and future of the World Health Organization. It therefore calls upon the Assembly not to hinder the work of the World Health Organization further, and proposes that this present debate be concluded and that the issue be decided now by vote.

The PRESIDENT: There are no more speakers, and therefore we have to close our debate on the last item on our agenda for today. May I answer certain remarks you made. First of all, all members of this Assembly spoke very favourably and expressed their admiration of the President and the General Committee. I must thank them, but at the same time they did not agree in full with my proposal.

Of course, during the last two years I have been doing my best to keep this Organization going on in the best spirit possible, and I am safe in saying that we succeeded in keeping this wonderful spirit.

Even at this Assembly we have almost never voted, and this has proved that we are trying to keep this spirit of international collaboration and mutual understanding. I am sure you will believe me when I say that I took great trouble over compiling such a list. I do not think there will be any President in the future who is going to be able to propose to you a list which will be agreeable to everybody. I have also my faults, as have the members of the General Committee. We are human beings, but I can assure you that I had always in mind the interest of our Organization. You should also believe me when I say that during the last two years I have come in contact with very many people and I know how they feel. I must also say that most of them show a very nice spirit indeed.

Are we going now to split on this important issue because we have to decide about the members of the Executive Board, which will last only for one year in practice? I told you also that the majority of the members of the Interim Commission will withdraw after they have worked on the Executive Board for one year. Even I myself am going to retire after one year. But I should be a most unhappy man if I felt that I had not succeeded in keeping you together in our fine and wonderful spirit. Therefore, may I appeal to you to trust me and to trust the General Committee. I can assure you that I am doing this job and making these proposals with best wishes for the future of our Organization.

You have already shown a spirit of particular friendship and understanding; I am not going to enumerate all the cases of this. Therefore I beg you to follow my advice because I feel very strongly that this procedure is the best one under the present circumstances. There is no better procedure, and I cannot refer this matter to the General Committee, because I am quite sure that the General Committee is not going to decide otherwise. I know their feelings. I consulted them. I consulted many members of the delegations and I tried to draw up a list agreeable to everybody. I did not succeed, of course.

Therefore in the first days of our activity as a permanent organization we should show a really fine spirit. The Swiss delegation withdraws its proposal to adjourn a decision on this important issue. There are, in fact no other proposals except mine, which is that of the General Committee. I feel, however, that many of you objected to this procedure and I think it is right to let you think over the matter. I do not like to see you feeling badly and to be under the impression that I was imposing something upon you. Never in my life did I do such a thing. When I make definite proposals to you, I can assure you that I know why I am doing so.

In face of the fact that many delegations have asked for the decision on this important issue to be postponed, I am adjourning the meeting today. We will vote on my proposals on Monday afternoon at 5 o'clock. As there are no other proposals except for the proposal of the General Committee, we shall vote by secret ballot on Monday afternoon.

I should like to show you that I am in favour of democratic principles. I am not afraid of my proposal and the proposal of the General Committee. After thinking, I am quite sure that you will agree to my proposal, because I feel strongly that you trust me. If, on Monday afternoon, I see that you do not trust me, I shall certainly be the most unhappy man in the world.

Our meeting this afternoon is adjourned. We shall meet on Monday at five o'clock. The agenda will be: voting on the proposal submitted to you by the General Committee and myself.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.
