



**World Health Organization  
Organisation mondiale de la Santé**

FIFTY-FIRST WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

---

**A51/DIV/13**  
15 May 1998

---

## **Citation**

**Award of the World Health Organization  
Health-for-All Gold Medal  
to  
Mrs Ruth Dreifuss  
Member of the Swiss Federal Council**

Federal Councillor Mrs Ruth Dreifuss, who was born at Saint-Gall in 1942, received her entire education in Geneva. In 1958 she was awarded a commercial diploma and in 1970 a diploma in economics. She has had a rich and varied professional career: from 1961 to 1964 she was a journalist with the weekly magazine *Coopération* (published by the Swiss Cooperatives Union); she was an assistant at the Geneva University Psychosocial Centre from 1965 to 1968 and at the University's Faculty of Economic and Social Science from 1970 to 1972; from 1972 to 1981 she was an official with the Swiss Development Cooperation Department and with the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs in Berne from 1972 to 1981, and Secretary of the Swiss Trade Union Federation from 1981 to 1993. In this latter capacity she was responsible, in particular, for sectors such as social insurance, labour law, the advancement of women and relations with the International Labour Organization.

She was elected Federal Councillor by the Swiss Federal Assembly on 10 March 1993 and became head of the Federal Department of the Interior three weeks later, a position she still holds. In her various fields of responsibility, it is in the sphere of public health and other areas associated with the well-being of Switzerland's population that she has been distinguished by her dynamism, competence and commitment. In particular, she was the driving force behind the new sickness insurance law which came into force on 1 January 1997 - and which has made coverage for all Swiss citizens mandatory. The Act also makes provision for insurance companies to finance disease-prevention and health-promotion measures.

Mrs Dreifuss has played a decisive role in Switzerland's policy on addictive drugs and has ensured priority for public health aspects. The policy is sustained by four pillars: prevention, treatment, damage and trauma reduction and punishment. Switzerland's plans of action against alcoholism and tobacco abuse are inspired by the recommendations of WHO's European Region.

Where HIV-infected blood and blood products are concerned, Mrs Dreifuss has firmly declared her intention to elucidate the sequence of events in the 1980s and to determine where responsibility for the propagation of the infection by this mode of transmission lies. She has played a decisive role in improving current regulations and in the decision to compensate infected persons.

The autonomy of each canton which is characteristic of the Swiss health system, and which is why it is one of the most expensive in the world, is responsible for the system's current crisis. Mrs Dreifuss' ambition is for a national health policy to be developed. This future policy will be inspired by WHO's health-for-all approach and be underpinned by a holistic concept of health whose purpose is to enable everyone to attain a state of full physical, mental and social well-being.

The World Health Organization is privileged to present the Health-for-All Gold Medal to Mrs Ruth Dreifuss, a member of the Swiss Federal Council and head of the Federal Department of the Interior, in recognition of her personal support and commitment to the social goal of health for all.

Hiroshi Nakajima, M.D., Ph.D.  
Director-General  
World Health Organization  
14 May 1998

= = =