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STANDARDIZATION OF LABORATORY TESTS OF FOOD

The Sixth World Health Assembly, being of the opinion that the increasing use of various chemical substances in the food industry presents a public-health problem, requested the Executive Board to study this subject at its thirteenth session.[1]

The delegations which supported and sponsored the resolution indicated that it would be useful for WHO to arrange for the co-ordination of the work of public-health laboratories working in this field, paying particular attention to the standardization of laboratory methods and tests.

In this connexion, the Director-General has the honour to make the following observations.

The problem is of an extremely complicated nature. Chemicals are added to foodstuffs with different purposes in mind, such as preservation, improvement of outward appearance, flavour, and palatability, and enhancement of the nutritional value, or for falsification. In all these instances, chemicals are added intentionally. This is not the case with vegetables and fruit on which residual insecticides may constitute a potential danger to health.

Having in mind the discussions at the Assembly, it appears to the Director-General that it was the intention of the Assembly that the study which the Executive Board has been requested to make should be limited to chemicals added to foodstuffs for reasons of preservation or for general improvement of their palatability. Even so, the question at issue is highly complex and requires very careful preparation and approach.

In order to study the possibility of standardization of laboratory methods, it is necessary first to obtain information regarding the existence in various countries of acts or regulations prescribing the use of certain laboratory methods. A knowledge of acts governing the admissibility or prohibition of

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[1] Resolution WHA6.16, Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org. 48, 22