

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Smallpox Eradication

25 May 1972

The debate on smallpox at the World Health Assembly was the longest and most interesting to date, eventually culminating in a resolution (enclosed). As I knew all concerned with the Smallpox Eradication Programme would be interested in the comments made by the various delegations, we have reproduced material from the provisional summary records of the sixth, eighth, ninth and tenth meetings for distribution to you. Some corrections to these summary records may yet be made before they are published in the official records of the Organization.

In addition, during the Assembly, Sir George Godber, (Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and Social Security, United Kingdom) in his speech following receipt of the Leon Bernard Foundation Prize, commented as follows on the smallpox programme:

\* "In many ways the most striking success of the Organization has been in smallpox eradication. That programme is not yet complete but the campaign has advanced at a pace and over a wide front such as few of us would have thought possible five years ago. We may truly be moving toward the elimination of a disease as old, perhaps, as man himself which in its time has ravaged every land and whose annual toll was certainly not fully known and must have been measured in millions. Without this Organization, and especially without the trust which is reposed in it by all countries, such a world-wide inter-country programme could not have been attempted, much less succeeded."

Following receipt of the prize, Sir George presented to the Director-General the accompanying cash award for deposit to the Special Account for Smallpox Eradication.

D. A. Henderson, M.D.  
Chief, Smallpox Eradication Unit

\* Sff rec 202, p 255



From the Address of the President of the 24th World Health Assembly,  
9 May 1972

(Sir William Refshauge, Commonwealth Director-General of Health, Australia)

"I believe this Organization has already justified its existence by the work it has sponsored towards the eradication or control of such diseases as smallpox, cholera, plague, trachoma, yaws and tuberculosis. Indeed, in spite of some temporary setbacks, the record of the smallpox campaign alone should pass into history as one of the World Health Organization's greatest achievements. You will recall that in 1967, after the replanning of its strategy against smallpox, WHO launched the final drive against smallpox with the target of complete eradication in 10 years. Half of those 10 years have now elapsed, and it does seem that, if the dramatic progress of the first five years is any guide, there are good prospects that the end of the second five years will see the final disappearance of smallpox throughout the world. If, as we all hope, this target can be achieved, it will be the first time in history that a once common disease has been totally eradicated. There can, of course be no complacency about an ultimate victory over smallpox and we must be constantly on guard against its sudden and unpredictable appearances. Recent events have surely demonstrated this, while evidencing at the same time the efficiency of the methods developed and the public confidence enjoyed by WHO."