

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND THE
INTERNATIONAL LEPROSY ASSOCIATION

In this department of the last issue of *THE JOURNAL*, Dr. J. A. Doull recounted in detail the stages by which the World Health Organization came into being. There was the organizing conference held in New York in July 1946, which prepared a constitution—the “Magna Charta of Health”—and set up an Interim Commission. There were the six sessions of that Commission, which in the two years of its existence, with money borrowed from the United Nations and inherited from UNRRA, carried on previously existing services and made certain important advances while preparing for setting up WHO on a permanent basis. There was the First World Health Assembly, held in Geneva in June 1948, after a sufficient number of Member nations of UN had formally accepted the constitution of WHO and thus brought it into being.

In the article referred to it was reported, among other things, that the Assembly recognized that WHO should collaborate not only with other agencies of the United Nations itself, such as the Economic and Social Councils, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Labor Organization, and especially the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and with governments and governmental organizations, but also with nongovernmental groups which contribute to the advancement of health. Such groups or organizations were exemplified by the World Medical Association, the International Unions against Tuberculosis, Venereal Diseases and Cancer, and the International Council of Nurses; but rules were laid down whereby other such organizations which “represent substantial portions of persons participating in the fields in which they operate, and have authority to speak for their members through their authorized representatives” might also affiliate. Dr. Doull’s note ended by recalling that the officers of the International Leprosy Association had been authorized, at a meeting held during the International Leprosy Congress in Havana last year, to negotiate with WHO with a view to obtaining recognition of the Association as its advisory body on leprosy matters. This present note is by way of being a report of what has transpired more recently.

Due representation having been made, directly and through Sir Wilson Jameson, advisor to the Ministry of Health in London, presumably endorsed by certain members of the Association who attended the first Assembly, the Association was granted recog-

dition [see *THE JOURNAL* 16 (1948) 479]. Notification of that fact was given by Dr. Brock Chisholm, director general of WHO, in a letter dated November 3, 1948:

I have the honour to inform you that, after considering the report of the Standing Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, the Executive Board of the World Health Organization decided to include the International Leprosy Association among the organizations to be brought into official relationship with the WHO.

I am happy to communicate the above decision to you, and am convinced that it will assist in the development of fruitful relations between our two organizations.

Some months prior to that, UNESCO had exhibited an interest in the Association when on July 6, 1948, Prof. J. Maisin asked for a copy of its Constitution and for other specific information about it and *THE JOURNAL*. This inquiry was in connection with the project of setting up a Permanent Council for the Co-ordination of International Congresses of Medical Sciences.

The first definitive step in the formal organization of that body had been taken in April 1948, when representatives of several medical organizations met in Paris to formulate plans and created an Organizing Committee, with an Executive Committee of which Professor Maisin, of the University of Louvain, was made chairman. In January 1949 an invitation was received by the Association to send a representative to a general conference to be held in Brussels early in April, under the sponsorship of UNESCO and WHO, for the purpose of establishing the proposed Permanent Council. At that meeting, which was attended by representatives of 38 international medical bodies—Dr. R. Chaussinand of the Institute Pasteur of Paris, a member of the General Council of the International Leprosy Association, representing that organization—there was created the Medical Congress Council which should in due course be of special interest to the Association.

The Medical Congress Council is an entirely independent organization, but will cooperate closely with the two sponsoring agencies and with other institutions interested in the development of medical science through the free exchange of knowledge between physicians of all countries. Through its coordinating activities it will attempt to change the present rather haphazard system of holding international congresses, and to reduce to a minimum the obstacles which impede contacts between physicians throughout the world.

The Council will study congress techniques, many of which have been worked out in recent years, and will be in a position

to give valuable advice. As an example of such techniques may be mentioned the Mental Health Congress held in England in 1948. About 200 working groups scattered in many countries had been previously studying the questions on the agenda, and were able to bring their mature findings to the Congress. At the congresses of the International Leprosy Association held in Cairo in 1938 and in Havana in 1948 the organizing groups, for want of previous experience, were at a great disadvantage. Knowledge of new techniques should be of immense value at the next International Leprosy Congress, scheduled to be held in 1953.

Besides forming the Medical Congress Council, the Brussels meeting set up an Executive Committee which comprises, besides the chairman, Professor Maisin who represents the International Union against Cancer, representatives of six other international bodies (surgery, pediatrics, radiology, venereal diseases, internal medicine, and forensic and social medicine). The Executive Committee serves as the directing body of the Council and carries out its decisions. The Council will be financed by member associations according to specific criteria worked out at the Conference. Both UNESCO and WHO, which contributed financially towards the Conference, will continue to contribute to the cost of the various services of the Council. [See news item, elsewhere in this issue.]

Arrangements have been made for the International Leprosy Association to be represented, again by Dr. Chaussinand, at the Second World Health Assembly, to be held at Rome in June. The most important item on the agenda of this gathering is the greatly expanded item for activities for 1950 as approved by the WHO Executive Board. This calls for increased services to government, with special reference to under-developed areas and war-devastated countries. A draft resolution will be submitted to the Assembly calling for approval of the principles laid down by the Executive Board for the collaboration of WHO with the Council for Coordination of International Congresses of Medical Services (Medical Congress Council). These are: (1) that the Council be recognized as a nongovernmental organization to be brought into official relationship with the WHO; (2) that a senior staff member of the secretariat of WHO be assigned by the Director General to represent the WHO at the meetings of the Council in an advisory capacity; (3) that the WHO assist the Council by giving advice upon request to selected congresses of interest to the WHO, and by supplying them with material support in the form of reimbursement of a part of the actual

expenses for the secretariat of the Council, technical services of the congresses, and publication of their proceedings, or, where possible, by direct participation in such technical services by the WHO staff.

Another feature of the multifarious activities of the UN, minor but not unimportant, is concerned with abstracting. An expert committee convened by UNESCO last year requested the secretariat of the International Federation for Documentation to investigate the present status of abstracting services in the pure and applied sciences. The stated object was to ascertain the degree of completeness of coverage of the scientific literature by existing services, and how far cooperation between these services might be promoted. A Committee on Abstracting Services was created which has sent out a questionnaire to periodicals which give such a service, including *THE JOURNAL*. [This inquiry has given rise to a note which appears separately in this department.]

It is to be hoped that WHO, and bodies like the Medical Congress Council which it sponsors, will do much to raise the standards of health services and the welfare of peoples throughout the world, and to spread better understanding and good-will among the nations.

—E. MUIR.