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Speech delivered by the Sec. Gen at The World

Health Assembly, 22 May 53

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SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE
UNITED NATIONS AT THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY, 22 MAY 1953

Before beginning my address, I would like to say with what regret I have heard of the sudden and serious illness yesterday of your distinguished President, and to express the sincere hope that he will make a speedy and complete recovery.

I feel it a great privilege to say a few words to the World Health Assembly as my first official act in Geneva since assuming the post of Secretary-General of the United Nations. It is a special privilege moreover to be the first to pay tribute, however brief and inadequate, to Dr. Chisholm's great statement of achievement, courage and hope and, at the same time, to pay a tribute to Dr. Chisholm himself, a great Director-General and a great man, to whom the whole family of United Nations organizations is so profoundly indebted. I am looking forward to maintaining and developing with his successor, Dr. Candau, the close co-operation, the mutual confidence and respect, that has characterised the relations between the United Nations and the WHO in the past.

The work of the WHO and the other Specialized Agencies for the improvement of the social and economic standards of mankind is, in one of its aspects - and not the least important one - part of the political work for the maintenance of international peace and security. The action taken by the World Health Assembly will have a bearing upon the political, economic and social world of the United Nations as a whole. But it is just as true that what happens in the Security Council and in the General Assembly of the United Nations on the great political problems dividing the world will have consequences, direct or indirect, for the program of the World Health Organization. Dr. Chisholm has just referred to the crucial interdependence of the different phases of international work directed towards the building of a happy and peaceful world community. You have continued to contribute strikingly your share of that great international effort. I hope that the United Nations will be able to make its contribution to the better political relationship between the nations of the world to which we, all of us, are looking forward with greater hope today than we have done for years.

The responsibility for an appropriate relationship between the general efforts in the political sphere of the United Nations and what is done in the special economic and social fields by the WHO and other Agencies in the United Nations family rests with all of us. But there exists a division of functions. A Specialized Agency has to assess the needs in its sphere. It should make its plans for meeting these needs and it should press for the contributions and help it may need from the general political body. But in order to keep the development in various fields in balance so as to avoid building the house without having laid the ground, or providing the beds before having built the rooms, a centralised planning is called for. Such planning can only in part be made by a specialized body.

For the rest it must be the work of an institution which like the United Nations itself is - or should be - in a position to take into consideration not only the various economic and social elements but also the wider political and overall aspects. The position of the Secretary-General under the United Nations Charter gives him a special obligation in this respect. From that point of view I will make it my duty to follow very closely what is done here and in the other organs of W.H.O. and from that point of view this first contact with you is to me of particular significance.

We have, all of us, in our respective organizations, a responsibility to carry out our work without duplication or overlapping and with a maximum economy of international resources.

The work of W.H.O. and the activities of the United Nations in the social field touch and complement one another at very many points. We are, moreover, engaged in many joint enterprises, in our regular programmes and - more important still - under the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance. It is a matter of great satisfaction to me that, as the World Health Assembly and the ECOSOC of the United Nations have both recognised, our two organisations and the other Specialized Agencies are steadily becoming better coordinated in all their activities. This is being achieved largely through constant consultation at the Secretariat level and the growth of a team spirit which I, for my part, will do all in my power to foster.

Just like the United Nations, the WHO is a servant of its Member Governments. The final responsibility for what is carried out in practice is theirs. Therefore, no co-ordination in the international sphere of the work of the various Organizations fulfills its purpose unless translated into and reflected in a co-ordination of the efforts and plans of the national Governments. This does not mean that the international Organizations are reduced to mere co-ordination and formulation of principles - just as the division of functions between general and specialized organizations does not mean that an organization like the U.N. should not push its own work to the most concrete point possible in the light of its general functions. But it does mean that the joint efforts of the U.N. and the WHO, in its sphere, should aim at giving, by mutual support, the best possible balance and the strongest possible impetus to the government activities which turn the plans and decisions into purposeful realities.

In your statement, Dr. Chisholm, you have said that for this generation there is no sane alternative but to accept with courage and determination the realities of the new era. These realities ~~are~~ such as to call for a rallying of all forces for the creation of such a life for men and nations as makes peace and freedom possible and gives to those words their full and rich meaning. You have made an important personal contribution to this end and under your guidance this Organization has been brought through and beyond its formative period. I trust that its work will be pursued in your spirit to the benefit of all and as an essential part of the work for the ends, which, as you pointed out, have found a noble expression in the Charter of the U.N.
