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CO-ORDINATION

REVIEW OF THE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS
AND THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL
ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

Views of the executive heads of organizations transmitted in
response to paragraph 13 of Economic and Social Council
resolution 1768 (LIV)

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

"I welcome the opportunity offered by the Economic and Social Council to comment on various aspects of co-ordination and the existing relationships between the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and other organizations of the system, to which Economic and Social Council resolution 1768 (LIV) refers.

"It would seem useful first to note the positive elements. Over the years a variety of bilateral or multilateral co-ordination relationships have developed throughout the system. The formal arrangements reflected in the relationship agreements between the United Nations and the World Health Organization, or those between the World Health Organization and other agencies, are one limited but vital element in the chain of established and functioning relationships. Virtually no new relationship agreements have come into force in the last 15 years, and co-ordination today goes far beyond the formal language of existing agreements, encompassing diverse forms of contact, collaboration and co-ordination between executive heads and their staffs, undertaken through consultations, meetings, correspondence and communication. The World Health Organization and other organizations have constant recourse to direct methods of consultation and co-ordination, supplemented where advisable by specific for limited memoranda of understanding.

"The broad range of activities and interests with which the organizations of the system are now concerned could not have been foreseen when the United Nations was established, but the system's ability to grow and develop in response to manifest needs provides confirmation of the flexibility of the structures conceived at San Francisco and the system has moved consistently forward. The

danger that the system might emerge as a fragmented group of independent isolated organizations has been averted, and while at times there has been friction between organizations working in related areas, or valid differences of approach to programme matters, most of these have been systematically overcome because of the common motivation to seek practical and beneficial solutions in problem areas. There is today greater awareness than in the past - in governments and secretariats - of the imperative and indispensable requirements of co-ordination as a means of improving formulation, planning and implementation of programme, although much still remains to be done if maximum effectiveness is to be achieved.

"The relationship agreements as they exist have facilitated rather than hampered the steady trend towards co-ordination, and thus together with the practical co-ordination arrangements of the Council, the governing bodies of the organizations of the system and their secretariats provide an adequate framework within which, given the will, the existing machinery can be adapted to any changes in programme or policy. The organizational arrangements that now exist are thus adequate and it would seem unfortunate if the Council were to be concerned with form rather than substance and take decisions which would divert energies fully required for programme activities to prolonged consideration of revision of the existing agreements.

"In response to the expansion of programme activity, various techniques have been devised beginning frequently with ad hoc arrangements in substantive areas which have in some cases been later formalized. Joint committees or expert groups, cross-representation at meetings and the maintenance of contacts at all levels between parallel technical or administrative officers are indications of the forms of co-ordination most commonly utilized.

"While the principle of co-ordination was first introduced and formalized at the intersectoral level involving the executive heads and secretariat staffs of the organizations of the system, the test of the effectiveness of the co-ordination, particularly in the programme agencies, is the extent to which it facilitates and improves the effectiveness of work at the country level. The World Health Organization has a constitutional mandate to assist governments upon request in strengthening health services and to furnish them with appropriate technical assistance and its regionalized structure has always been viewed as a means of providing such assistance. The Council, in operative paragraph 13 of resolution 1768 (LIV), has asked the Secretary-General to report on relationships, in particular in the operational field, and in its discussions of this paragraph members of the Council made extensive reference to UNDP.

"It is important to make clear that in WHO we are concerned at the country level with the provision of assistance under the regular budget of the organization as well as that made possible by the UNDP. Thus the WHO country representatives provide advice and assistance to the ministers of health and co-operate with the resident representatives of UNDP as well as with the representatives of other specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, and of bilateral and multilateral programmes providing assistance in the health sector. External resources represent only a small part of the total input to country

programming, the largest amount being provided by the national government. Particular efforts are made to assist ministries of health in the development of programmes that will not only respond to the most pressing needs within the health sector but will, in the case of developing countries, be placed in the framework of socio-economic development. The World Health Organization is committed to participation in the formulation and implementation of multisectoral, multidisciplinary programmes at the country level. In our view there is a firm foundation for continued and intensified collaboration at the national level that should lead to broader multisectoral projects of assistance to governments in major areas where external resources and technical assistance are required. The objective in each instance is to provide the kind of assistance of a transitional character that will serve during the period needed for governments to develop national personnel and facilities for direct implementation of national programmes. A substantial number of countries should reach this stage in the course of the Second United Nations Development Decade. Efforts to assist all developing countries should enable us during the Decade to establish fully the ability of the organizations of the system to function in multisectoral teams.

"Extensive functional decentralization has increasingly taken place within WHO and the regional directors, with the assistance of the WHO country representatives, who have long been responsible for technical assistance provided through the WHO regular budget, are now also responsible for activities assisted by the UNDP. Problems in many of the developing countries are so acute, particularly in relation to shortage of health manpower, that governments have requested, and WHO has provided directly or jointly with UNDP, assistance in a large number of projects which do not necessarily constitute an integrated approach to development even in the health sector. Under the guidance of the World Health Assembly which has developed the organization's approach to country health programming, it is anticipated that the forthcoming period will be marked by a change in the character of technical assistance, with greater emphasis being placed on broader programmes of a fundamental character and adaptation of central services to respond to new needs. This modification in approach is now becoming possible in a number of developing countries which have, on their own initiative and with WHO assistance, now developed substantial resources in personnel and greatly increased capacities for national health programming and planning.

"Implicitly, this new approach presupposes that governments will, at the national level, ensure that adequate consideration in country-wide development planning is given to the role of health and its importance as a factor contributing to development. It thus requires governmental decision-making and the expression of governmental intent. The desired results can only be achieved if full confidence exists between government ministries and planning commissions and the corresponding agencies or organizations of the United Nations system, individually and as a whole, and if the representatives of the various United Nations organizations and agencies concerned at the national level function as an effective team. The development of such confidence is indispensable to the achievement of effective co-ordination at the country level. WHO is prepared to do everything possible to assist the development of such co-ordination at the national level.

"The effectiveness of activities at the country level is, in turn, affected by the responsibility assumed at the centre of international organizations and the policy guidance provided by the legislative bodies. By drawing attention to the importance of country health programming, for example, the Economic and Social Council can reinforce the efforts being made to achieve collaborative efforts on a sectoral level and the Council can also contribute its guidance on the achievement of intersectoral co-ordination. Within the various organizations the legislative bodies and the central services provide continuing technical information, advice and guidance which are applicable to developed and developing countries alike. While every effort is made to draw the full benefits from functional and operational decentralization it is essential that the various technical agencies develop a cohesive programmatic approach. In this exercise they have the benefit of the aggregate feedback of information on activities at the country level and the capability for comparison and analysis of the effectiveness of various activities. The information which thus becomes available will facilitate the identification of areas of work as well as of techniques which will contribute most beneficially to the attainment of programme objectives. Thus the development and use of such information increases operational efficiency and constitutes an important element in the development of medium-term programming.

"The concept of medium-term programming has only recently been accepted throughout the system. The World Health Organization is now operating under its Fifth General Programme of Work Covering a Specific Period, 1973-1977 inclusive, which is a general programme setting forth prevailing conditions, objectives and priority areas. The World Health Assembly approved the first such programme in 1950 and over the years the programmes have provided an outline within which specific annual programme and budget documents have been approved. These general programmes of work have been a great utility, but the augmented capabilities in the field of information and retrieval, the development of new methodology such as systems analysis, and the acceptance on a system-wide basis of the necessities of medium-term programming now make it essential that procedures be developed which will enable the formulation of programmes of a more specific, quantified character with a more precise statement of objectives. Such preparation will necessitate consultations with the other organizations of the system on areas which lend themselves to effective joint or collaborative activity. The World Health Organization is prepared to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the United Nations and the other organizations of the system in the development of medium-term programming and in the selection of areas of country-level or central activity which lend themselves to an interagency or multisectoral approach. WHO is also prepared to work with programme teams at the country or global level, in an effort to relate specific country or sectoral needs to the total demands of integrated economic and social development. The Economic and Social Council can provide major assistance in facilitating the initiation of this new approach, in urging governments to collaborate fully in the development of such new procedures and in drawing the attention of governments to the decisive importance of co-ordination at the national level. The Council can assist the process of medium-term programming by identifying specific areas of common concern and working out broad approaches to problems of system-wide importance. It can thus make a more dynamic contribution than if it confined itself to a narrow arbitrary approach to budgetary relationships.

"The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination provides a mechanism through which the executive heads consult on the implementation of programmes developed either by the Economic and Social Council or by the legislative bodies of the various organizations. The ACC plays a particular role in assuring appropriate and adequate responses by the various organizations of the system to the requests of the Council. The executive heads represent organizations each of which is comprised of governments and, in almost all cases, is directed by intergovernmental legislative bodies. The Council has recognized the valuable assistance given by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination which, by drawing on all resources of the system, has had occasion to present to the Council comprehensive reports on such matters as the human environment, the Green Revolution, and world employment policy. The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination should be able to utilize most of the time at its semi-annual meetings for consultation on major policy decisions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly which are being implemented by the component organizations. The Council could make a contribution by limiting its requests to the specialized agencies and United Nations programmes to questions of fundamental importance. The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination could in turn place its collective technical expertise at the service of the Council and could propose initiatives in response to the Council's major preoccupations.

"The World Health Organization has systematically brought to the attention of its Executive Board and the World Health Assembly all relevant decisions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly and has exerted every effort to provide documentation in response to requests of the Council and the General Assembly. In January 1974, I brought to the attention of the Executive Board more than 70 resolutions dealing with some 35 subjects and provided to the Board the full texts not only of resolution 1768 (LIV) but of several other resolutions relevant to the work of the organization. I would be remiss if I did not draw attention to the multiplicity of requests which are received for the provision of responses or documents. May I express the hope that the Council, as part of its rationalization efforts, take action to ensure that the specialized agencies are called upon to respond with documentation relevant to their fields of competence which can contribute directly to the policy-forming process of the United Nations principal organs, thus avoiding diffusion and dissipation of efforts which have recently caused difficulties to the agencies. The Council can make a positive contribution in this respect.

"Under operative paragraph 12 of resolution 1768 (LIV) the Council is to undertake a review of its subsidiaries and their functioning. It is my hope that the review will lead to a greater simplification of the structure of the Council's subsidiaries particularly in so far as co-ordination is concerned, as streamlining of the present machinery will contribute to the effectiveness of the work of the United Nations system as a whole.

"I have not considered it necessary to discuss many aspects of co-ordination which have been considered in depth by the Executive Board of WHO and the World Health Assembly, particularly in the 'Organizational Study on Co-ordination with the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies'. It seems more useful for the document to be before the Council as background to this statement of my views

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and a sufficient supply will be made available for the study to be circulated at the fifty-sixth session of the Economic and Social Council.

"In accordance with the Council's request, this response is directed to operative paragraph 13 of resolution 1768 (LIV). There are numerous other provisions of this resolution which are of concern to the World Health Organization, particularly the Council's reconfirmation in the preamble of the need for a 'renewed commitment' to create 'a more just and rational world economic and social order for the benefit of all people and nations'. These objectives coincide with those of the World Health Organization and have our full support. We are prepared to join with the Council in the initiatives it may undertake in pursuit of these worthy goals."

H. Mahler, M.D.
Director-General
