



Fourteenth session
Agenda item 71

INTERNATIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
INTO THE CONTROL OF CANCEROUS DISEASES

Report of the Third Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Francisco Cuevas CANCINO (Mexico)

1. At its 826th plenary meeting on 12 October 1959, the General Assembly included the item entitled "International encouragement of scientific research into the control of cancerous diseases" in its agenda and allocated it to the Third Committee.
2. The Committee had before it two explanatory memoranda submitted by the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (A/4233 and A/C.3/L.777).
3. The Committee devoted seven meetings (948th to 954th meetings), held from 6 to 12 November 1959, to the consideration of the item.
4. The representative of the Byelorussian SSR opened the debate by introducing the revised draft resolution submitted by his delegation (A/C.3/L.772/Rev.1). He stated that, despite the efforts of generations of scientists, the causes of cancerous diseases were still unknown and no effective methods of treatment had been found. In a large number of countries, they were second only to cardiovascular diseases as a cause of death. The mortality rates for those diseases had risen from 64 per 100,000 in 1900 to 147 per 100,000 in 1955. At the present time, approximately 5 million of the world's inhabitants were suffering from cancerous diseases. Although cancer affected mainly the middle-aged and the elderly, it was now appearing to an increasing degree among younger age groups.

5. He referred to measures taken in the Soviet Union and the United States with regard to control of cancer and expressed his belief that joint efforts on the part of scientists from all countries were called for in the fight against cancer.

6. The causes of cancer were still unknown. The virus theory had not been corroborated by the discovery of any causative viral agent in man. A most important means of shedding light on the causes of cancerous diseases was a study of their characteristics by countries and of the relationship between particular types of cancerous tumours and geographical, climatic, occupational and other factors. The lower mortality rate for cancer found in the under-developed countries could be explained in terms of incomplete assessment of causes of death by the inadequately developed medical and health services of those countries. One of the important tasks of the new science of medical geography would be to prepare maps showing the distribution of cancer throughout the world and to carry out regional studies.

7. The representative of the Byelorussian SSR commended the efforts of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Union against Cancer, but felt that it would be desirable that both organizations, in their long-range programmes, should intensify co-ordination of scientific research plans and should organize exchanges of information and experience through visits of outstanding medical cancer specialists.

8. He did not believe that the expenditure of \$100,000 every four years, as proposed in the draft resolution, would give rise to any difficulties. While the greatest reward for any scientist responsible for advances in cancer research would be the gratitude and recognition of all mankind, the prizes provided for would represent a concrete manifestation of that recognition.

9. He knew that some delegations felt that the matter of cancer control was one which properly belonged to WHO. However, the problem was so urgent and important that only an organization with the authority of the United Nations could deal with it.

10. The revised draft resolution submitted by the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (A/C.3/L.772/Rev.1) read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"Considering that cancer is at present one of the diseases most dangerous to mankind,

"Recognizing the general desire of all mankind to eliminate wide-spread cancerous diseases,

"Noting with approval the useful work carried out by the World Health Organization, the International Union against Cancer and national organizations for the control of cancerous diseases,

"Recognizing further that the national and international efforts so far undertaken for the control of cancerous diseases have not yielded sufficiently effective results,

"Wishing to encourage further scientific efforts in this field in all countries and international institutions,

"1. Establishes, for the most outstanding scientific work in connexion with the control of cancerous diseases, United Nations prizes:

(a) first prize: \$50,000;

(b) second prize: \$30,000;

(c) third prize: \$20,000;

to be awarded once every four years;

"2. Requests the World Health Organization to undertake to award the prizes, holding the first prize-giving ceremony at the regular scientific Congress on the control of cancerous diseases in 1962;

"3. Requests the International Union against Cancer to give the World Health Organization its full support and its scientific advice for this purpose;

"4. Invites the World Health Organization to consider, in accordance with article IV of the Agreement between the United Nations and the World Health Organization, what further steps may be taken to encourage effort in this field;

"5. Requests the World Health Organization to inform the United Nations General Assembly in 1962 of the progress achieved in the control of cancerous diseases."

11. Many speakers congratulated the Byelorussian delegation on its humanitarian initiative. It was also pointed out that much time and money was being wasted as a result of unsatisfactory co-ordination of the research undertaken in various countries. Cancer-control campaigns had already been organized in a number of countries. It was felt that every national action should be encouraged and supplemented by an international effort.

12. Several speakers drew attention to the fact that WHO had been concerned with the question for many years, and that, in its work, it co-operated with such specialized agencies as the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and with various scientific organizations. It was recalled that a proposal had been adopted at the eleventh World Health Assembly that an extensive examination be made of the role of WHO in medical and health research. The report which had followed contained, inter alia, certain recommendations for increasing the world research potential against cancer. Considerable contributions had been subsequently made to the special account for medical research in order to enable WHO to give additional impetus to the intensified research programme.

13. Some delegations pointed out that WHO should be given the principal responsibility for action in the field referred to in the Byelorussian draft resolution, and that the International Union against Cancer could not be placed on an equal footing with it. It was also argued that the General Assembly should not, in the form of a resolution, express its views on the subject of activities within the purview of a specialized agency, unless that agency had clearly failed in the performance of its tasks. The need for consultation and proper co-ordination between the United Nations and the specialized agencies was also stressed.

14. Some speakers questioned the awarding of prizes as the best way to encourage the efforts of scientists. It was suggested that the money could be employed rather for the purchase of equipment or the provision of fellowships. Others felt, however, that the prizes would draw public attention to the work of the scientists and to the non-political activities of the United Nations.

15. The representative of WHO reviewed the position of his organization in the campaign against cancer. In its early days, WHO had confined its work on cancer

mainly to the granting of fellowships for advanced study abroad and to the preparation of certain statistical studies. It had also recommended standard definitions, nomenclatures and classifications, and had promoted the adoption of common techniques of diagnosis and treatment. The assessment of the results of the different treatments of cancer - surgical, radiological and others - had likewise received attention. This was followed by recommendations concerning the establishment of certain national laboratories as reference laboratories. He recalled that UNESCO had undertaken international programmes of research into physical, chemical and biological phenomena of cell growth. WHO co-operated actively also with the International Union against Cancer and the International Congress on Radiology. In March 1959 a special scientific group on cancer research, convened by the Director-General of WHO, had outlined certain areas where cancer research could be advanced by multinational or international action with WHO serving as the central point. The experts had suggested that co-ordinated studies should be made on all agents suspected of causing cancer. A research programme, based on the recommendations of twenty-one such groups convened by the Director-General, had been approved by the twelfth World Health Assembly. A sum of \$500,000 had been added to the 1960 regular budget for the programme and a special account had been established to enable WHO to accept voluntary contributions.

16. The representative of the Secretary-General stated that it was for the Third Committee to decide whether it wished to recommend the award of prizes to encourage scientific research into the control of cancerous diseases, or whether it preferred to refer the proposal now before it to WHO. The Secretary-General saw no objection to establishing United Nations prizes for that purpose, provided that the responsibility of deciding to whom they should be awarded was entrusted to WHO. The question of the financial implications would have to be dealt with by the Fifth Committee, which might prefer that the proposed amount of \$100,000 be kept in a special account rather than be included in the regular budget of the United Nations. He added that the Fifth Committee might consider it an unusual procedure to make the funds for the prizes available to WHO, since that organization's financial resources, like those of the United Nations, were provided by contributions from Member States.

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17. The United States of America submitted amendments (A/C.3/L.800) to the Byelorussian revised draft resolution (A/C.3/L.772/Rev.1). These amendments provided for:

- (a) The deletion of operative paragraphs 1 and 2;
- (b) The amendment of operative paragraph 3 to read as follows:

"3. Invites the World Health Organization to seek the full support and scientific advice of the International Union against Cancer for this purpose.";

(c) The addition, at the end of operative paragraph 4, of the phrase: "including the desirability of making international awards for research into cancerous diseases, or other similar methods of encouragement";

(d) The replacement, in operative paragraph 5, of the words "in 1962" by the words "as soon as possible".

18. After a discussion, the Committee received revised United States amendments (A/C.3/L.800/Rev.1), now sponsored by Colombia as well, to the Byelorussian draft resolution. These amendments provided for the deletion of operative paragraphs 1 and 2 and the replacement of operative paragraphs 3 and 4 by the following:

"3. Invites the World Health Organization to consider, in accordance with article IV of the Agreement between the United Nations and the World Health Organization, what further steps may be taken to encourage effort in the field of the control of cancerous diseases;

"3A. Invites the World Health Organization to consider the advisability of establishing and awarding prizes for cancer research according to the following suggested schedule: ten prizes of \$10,000 each to be awarded every four years for the most outstanding scientific works in connexion with the control of cancerous diseases, the prizes to be known as United Nations prizes;

"4. Also invites the World Health Organization to seek the full support and scientific advice of the International Union against Cancer for this purpose."

19. Greece submitted sub-amendments (A/C.3/L.809) to the revised amendments by Colombia and the United States of America (A/C.3/L.800/Rev.1). These sub-amendments were subsequently withdrawn, following the introduction of the eight-Power sub-amendments (see para. 20).

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20. Afghanistan, Ceylon, Greece, Iceland, India, Ireland, Mexico and the Philippines submitted sub-amendments (A/C.3/L.810) to the revised amendments of Colombia and the United States of America (A/C.3/L.800/Rev.1). These sub-amendments provided for the replacement of paragraph 3A by the following text:

"Decides to institute suitable prizes of the total value of \$100,000 to be awarded for the most outstanding scientific research work in the causes and control of cancerous diseases, and requests the Secretary-General to arrange for the awarding of the prizes during the next four years, on the recommendation of the World Health Organization, and to renew this award periodically as long as it is considered necessary, the prizes to be known as United Nations prizes."

21. The representative of the Philippines suggested that the phrase "to be placed at the disposal of the World Health Organization" be inserted in the eight-Power sub-amendments (A/C.3/L.810) between the words "\$100,000" and "to be awarded". He subsequently withdrew his suggestion.

22. At its 953rd meeting, the Committee voted as follows on the proposals before it:

(a) The eight-Power sub-amendments (A/C.3/L.810) were adopted by a roll-call vote of 48 to 18, with 10 abstentions. The voting was as follows:

In favour: Afghanistan, Albania, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burma, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Cambodia, Canada, Ceylon, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Federation of Malaya, Finland, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Jordan, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Arab Republic, Venezuela, Yemen, Yugoslavia.

Against: Australia, Belgium, China, Colombia, Denmark, France, Haiti, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

Abstaining: Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Panama, Peru, Spain, Uruguay.

(b) The revised amendments submitted by Colombia and the United States of America (A/C.3/L.800/Rev.1) as amended, were adopted by 65 votes to 1, with 10 abstentions.

(c) The revised draft resolution submitted by the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (A/C.3/L.772/Rev.1), as amended, was approved by a vote of 60 to none, with 15 abstentions.

Recommendation of the Third Committee

23. The Third Committee therefore recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

INTERNATIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
INTO THE CONTROL OF CANCEROUS DISEASES

The General Assembly,

Considering that cancer is at present one of the diseases most dangerous to mankind,

Recognizing the general desire of all mankind to eliminate wide-spread cancerous diseases,

Noting with approval the useful work carried out by the World Health Organization, the International Union against Cancer and national organizations for the control of cancerous diseases,

Recognizing further that the national and international efforts so far undertaken for the control of cancerous diseases have not yielded sufficiently effective results,

Wishing to encourage further scientific efforts in this field in all countries and international institutions,

1. Decides to institute suitable prizes of a total value of \$100,000 - the prizes to be known as United Nations prizes - to be awarded for the most outstanding scientific research work in the causes and control of cancerous diseases, and requests the Secretary-General to arrange for the awarding of the prizes during the next four years, on the recommendation of the World Health Organization, and to renew this award periodically as long as it is considered necessary;

2. Invites the World Health Organization to consider, in accordance with article IV of the Agreement between the United Nations and the World Health Organization, what further steps may be taken to encourage efforts in the field of the control of cancerous diseases;

3. Also invites the World Health Organization to seek the full support and scientific advice of the International Union against Cancer for this purpose;

4. Requests the World Health Organization to inform the United Nations General Assembly as soon as possible of the progress achieved in the control of cancerous diseases.
