

Nations Specialized Agencies. WHO has deep historical roots, going back more than a century to an era when talk of world co-operation might justifiably have been labelled utopian.

In 1851, delegates to the First International Health Conference met in Paris. Few concrete results were evident, but the fact that it convened at all showed dawning awareness. Progress came with accelerated pace. The late nineteenth century was an era of change, when old barriers were coming down. In 1869, the Suez Canal was opened and Europeans suddenly became acutely aware that the world was shrinking. Specifically, the control of cholera from the Far East became an immediate problem. In 1907, after much discussion, L'Office International d'Hygiène Publique ("The Paris Office") was created to disseminate information on communicable diseases. Thirteen nations signed the agreement which set up the Office. In 1908, Canada joined them.

Facts and documents were collected on public health and the control of other infectious diseases besides cholera, such as plague, yellow fever, smallpox and epidemic typhus, received attention. The Paris Office continued, with some expansion of its functions, until the birth of the UN, and its subsequent integration into the UN family.

Preceding but paralleling these developments came significant progress in the Americas. In 1887, three South American countries joined hands in the fight against cholera, yellow fever and plague. In 1902, 14 American states signed the Sanitary Convention, forerunner of the Pan-American Sanitary Code of 1924, later ratified by all 21 American republics, members of the Pan-American Health Organization.

Between the two world wars, the League of Nations set up a provisional (later a permanent) health organization. Its aims were ambitious—epidemic control and also a wide area of health prevention, including nutrition, housing and physical education. The organization also sponsored exchange of trained staff between nations and gave financial help to governments improving their health services.

The evolution of international co-operation for world health reached new stature with the coming of WHO. The UN had been conceived in world conflict. New insights into the causes of war were manifest and, in this context, the preamble to WHO's constitution flatly states:

The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and states.

Far greater in conception and scale than its predecessors, WHO thus represents the latest and most reassuring chapter in a long story. It has