

Remarks on receiving the degree, Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, at Commencement exercises for the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey on 25 May 2004, Trenton, New Jersey

It is a signal honor to be recognized by a distinguished university such as this with the award of an honorary degree. I am profoundly grateful. This is and will always be a memorable day for all of you and certainly for me – as members all of the New Jersey University of Medicine and Dentistry class of 2004. congratulate you!

The conquest of smallpox, the greatest killer in all history, has rightly been hailed as one of the most important achievements of the past century. I was privileged to play a role in that program. It is important to understand that it was not the achievement of one or a few individuals, nor the achievement of one or a few countries. It was the result of a program, decided upon by the World Health Assembly and organized and directed by the World Health Organization. Programs were conducted in more than 50 countries; upwards of 100,000 workers were regularly engaged. However, international staff providing assistance never numbered more than 100 persons in the field at any one time and they came from some 73 different countries themselves. It was a program that was largely staffed and funded by the endemic countries themselves. The U.S. was but one of more than 50 contributors of international funds and the U.S. share was little more than 10% of the total. Although a number of us were from the U.S. working under WHO direction, it was not a US program; it was a WHO program and countries across the world took pride in the achievement of eradication, as they should.

The total cost in international assistance was \$100 million. Learning of how little was expended, a number have asked why the U.S. didn't simply conduct the program itself rather than going through the difficulties intrinsic to working through a multi-lingual, complex international bureaucracy. From 11 years of experience in the program, I can say, with certainty, that such a nationally sponsored and directed U.S. program would never have worked! Much more was needed than money and capable personnel. It was essential to have the backing and support of political and religious leaders, of public health and medical staff and of the public at large in order for a program such as this to reach not millions but billions of people. As the program gained momentum, governments increasingly came to realize that the program was theirs, that they bore the primary responsibility for making it work. Building on this program, WHO is now moving toward the global eradication of poliomyelitis and of the effective control of a number of

important infectious diseases. Note also that it was WHO's early and effective leadership that served to block the international spread of SARS last year.

The future of the U.S. and of mankind rests heavily upon our ability to work effectively and well with peoples throughout the world in dealing together with the problems of the health and the well-being of all mankind. The international organizations, imperfect although they may be, represent our greatest hope for the future with opportunities whose boundaries have scarcely been probed. Public health and medicine have demonstrated a unique capacity to build the critical but still fragile bridges of cooperation and understanding. As you contemplate your own future, give thought to what you might do in a greater international context. For that is where the future lies!