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Opening Speech for the

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On behalf of the World Health Organization and on behalf of the participants of this Conference, I wish to express our appreciation to the Government of Thailand, particularly His Excellency the Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Health for the most cordial welcome we have received and for the many efforts which they have already made to make this Conference possible.

We are this year embarked on an historic mission - a programme to eliminate once and for all the most serious disease known to mankind. Never in history have the nations of the world joined in a common effort to achieve a goal such as this. The programme was initiated ~~in 1966~~ in 1966 by unanimous vote in the World Health Assembly. During the past year, support has come from many countries in the form of donations to the Organization and in bilateral support to the endemic countries. You should know, in fact, that the principal donors of additional support are, in fact, two countries who do not always agree - the Soviet Union and the United States of America. This programme, as smallpox itself, does not recognize political differences or political boundaries.

So far as we can determine, 28 countries in three continents currently experience endemic smallpox; there are, however, 39 others who by reason of geographic proximity and population movements are constantly threatened by disease introductions and the reestablishment of endemic foci. Of the 28 endemic countries, 22 are located in Africa, 5 in Asia and one in South America. I am sure you will be pleased to know that in this, the first year of the programme, 21 of the 28 countries have already undertaken special intensive programmes of smallpox eradication. A substantial proportion of

the 39 countries which border on these endemic zones have also initiated special programmes of vaccination to improve their immunity as well as intensified programmes of surveillance.

Perhaps, paradoxically, the reported number of cases of smallpox this year has increased in every geographic region, in the Americas, in Africa and in Asia. Increases in the Americas and in West Africa have been comparatively small and are, in major part, accounted for by improved reporting resulting from surveillance programmes inaugurated at the time of development of eradication efforts in each of these areas. In Asia, however, the story is different. The increase in the incidence of smallpox has been substantial. Major epidemics have swept India - Pakistan reports an increasing incidence - in Indonesia, epidemics have erupted in many parts of Java. The disease is not confined to the rural and remote areas. It presently afflicts every major city in these countries including the capitals themselves. In many cases, the cities are in fact more heavily infected than the rural areas. Although, as previously noted, 75% of the reported cases of smallpox occur in Asia, this undoubtedly understates the comparative seriousness of the problem in this region. Recent surveys indicate that smallpox is more poorly reported here than elsewhere, including Africa. Probably not more than 10% of the cases in Asia are now recorded - the real total of cases in the 5 endemic Asian countries during 1967 is probably approaching one million. From India, from Pakistan infection spread this year to Kuwait, to Oman, to Czechoslovakia, to Germany, to the United Kingdom. Next year it may be Thailand or Burma or Laos or Vietnam or Malaysia or the Philippines.

The problem is shared by us all. During this Conference, we hope to discuss the problems posed by smallpox to all countries represented, to discuss the approaches to combat it in endemic regions and to prevent its introduction into non-infected areas.

We at WHO have redoubled our efforts to assist you in your efforts to combat smallpox.

1. As first priority, we are endeavouring to assure adequate supplies of potent freeze-dried vaccine for all countries. Donations to the Organization have increased. In 1966, 3 million doses only were distributed; in 1967, 15 million doses, and, next year, we anticipate that the number will rise to 56 million doses. The Soviet Union , through bilateral assistance, is providing this year more than 100 million doses of vaccine; the United States, 40 million doses. In co-operation with UNICEF, additional equipment is being supplied to 10 vaccine production institutes in endemic areas; consultants have been provided to more than 20 institutes. Research on vaccine production is in progress in the Soviet Union, England, Netherlands and Switzerland. ~~A special meeting of vaccine producers has been called to develop a manual on vaccine production based upon the most current knowledge. Vaccine testing provided by the WHO testing laboratory has increased from 16 tests in 1966 to more than 75 in 1967.~~

2. The technical basis and strategy for the eradication programme is being carefully studied and elaborated. A Scientific Group was convened in Geneva during October; their report is being made available to you at this meeting. A Manual on Smallpox Eradication has been prepared; over 900 copies have been distributed. Surveillance reports to provide an exchange of information between programme directors and investigators and to chart the course of the campaign are now being sent to over 1000 persons concerned with smallpox eradication. The second issue of this report has just been printed; copies are here for you.

3. The WHO has this year developed plans of operations and signed agreements with 24 countries to provide assistance in the form of technical staff, equipment, vaccine and special costs.

4. To prevent extension of the endemic reservoir, a special vaccine reserve and jet injectors have been established in Geneva and provisions made to provide emergency assistance to any of the non-endemic ~~developing~~ countries who experience importations of smallpox. Twice this year, such assistance was provided - staff and vaccine arrived in the afflicted country less than 48 hours after a request for assistance was received.

5. Special studies have been instituted to develop new instruments and techniques for vaccination. Jet injectors have now been used extensively in West Africa and Brazil and have been found to be most effective, capable of vaccinating as many as 1000 persons per hour with successful takes in a higher percentage than is normally achieved by manual methods. These will be demonstrated for you this week. ~~Smaller, less expensive instruments are under test.~~ A forked needle for multiple puncture vaccination has been tested and found effective. This needle permits vaccination with one-fifth the normal amount of vaccine normally required. Five million needles will be delivered in January for use in Pakistan and several countries in Africa.

6. In support of laboratory diagnosis, a manual on diagnostic methods for smallpox is in preparation; necessary reagents for the specified tests are now being produced. This manual and the reagents should be ready for instructional courses late next year. The methods themselves will be demonstrated for you this week.

7. Field studies of smallpox epidemiology, operational techniques and a variety of more technical studies have been initiated, many with WHO support - these studies are already pointing the way to new approaches in eradication programmes. Some of those who have been actively engaged in these studies have been brought to Bangkok to discuss their findings with you.

In brief, I believe I can confidently say that the global programme for smallpox eradication, in this the first of its 10 years, has begun well. Most endemic countries have already indicated that they consider seriously their obligations to their neighbours and have instituted eradication programmes.

This Conference is the first to be conducted under this new programme. I cannot imagine a more pleasant place for it to be held nor more hospitable hosts. It is fitting that it be conducted in a country which suffered from endemic smallpox for centuries but which, this year, celebrates its fifth smallpox-free year.

May I again express our appreciation to the Government of Thailand and to the many who have worked to make the arrangements for this Conference.

It is my hope that 9 years from today we might again meet here to announce formally and finally that the most devastating disease ever known to mankind has been obliterated from the face of this earth.