

The Right to Health

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At an historic session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1970, two decisions were taken closely touching the legitimate aspiration and the right of every human being to physical, social and economic well-being. One was to designate 1974 as "World Population Year", the other to adopt an international strategy for the Second Development Decade (1970-1980).

The Second Development Decade is making a determined step forward in the quest for improved well-being, not only for the present generation, but for future generations. The programme for World Population Year is designed to bring about an increasing awareness of the nature and complexity of population questions and their bearing on human affairs. The high point of the Year will be the World Population Conference to be held in Bucharest, Rumania, from 19 to 30 August. It will be an inter-governmental rather than a technical conference, concerned with the promotion of human welfare and development. A world population plan of action, which is expected to be one of the major outputs of the Conference, will probably deal, among other things, with the reduction of morbidity and mortality. Concern will also be voiced about problems of urban pressure and the social breakdown and dislocation that may often result, unemployment and youth dependency, migration both within countries and between countries, family health and welfare, the protection of human rights and the enhancement of the quality of life.

Concern for the quality of life is basic to the work of the World Health Organization and is expressed in the WHO Constitution. WHO holds the conviction that a population enjoying the best possible standard of health is a fundamental factor in successful economic and social development. In the final analysis, it is man himself who

creates wealth, and his health is therefore essential to the completion of the challenging tasks set for the decade, and to the accomplishment of the aims of the World Population Year and Conference.

It is clear that development intended to improve the social welfare of people cannot be achieved by isolated measures. It is also clear that the promotion of health cannot be achieved by measures that derive from any single health discipline, nor can public health be considered independently of the broader, economic, educational, socio-cultural and administrative factors that are crucial to human development. The promotion of health, as a state of complete physical mental and social well-being, calls upon the full range of scientific knowledge and the resources of the health service disciplines listed in the health strategy for the Development Decade. These include communicable disease control and eradication, cooperation with agricultural agencies in nutrition, and special programmes for children and youth designed to ensure their total needs are met in an integrated manner. Improved housing, arresting the deterioration of the human environment, and maintaining the ecological balance also require urgent attention. Similarly, the further promotion of a country's health depends on the existence of a minimum programme to develop facilities for medical training and research and to bring necessary medical services, including those for maternal and child health and family planning, within the reach of the remotest community. Success in establishing such health services, and specially those at the periphery, is conditional on the involvement of the community in their planning and implementation.

WHO recognizes that, irrespective of any population policy, family planning is an essential part of family health care, and that its health and social benefits are well

known. Family planning is a way of thinking and living that is adopted voluntarily, upon the basis of knowledge, attitudes, and responsible decisions by individuals and couples, in order to promote the health and welfare of the family group and thus contribute effectively to the social development of a country. The special role of WHO is to assist governments in building and in strengthening a health infrastructure, suited to their needs, that interact dynamically with even the remotest community and will honour the social right of men and women everywhere to receive relevant information and services designed to improve their health. It may be hoped that such coverage will result in establishing fruitful human contacts between the consumer and the system and in helping people to understand the true health significance of family planning for themselves and their families.

Success must be achieved in the rural areas, where over 80 per cent of the world's population live. It is there that the health care delivery system must reach, and that development must be encouraged. With renewed determination, administrators and community leaders should carry out their duty to ensure that whatever technology can be delivered through the health services is made directly available to ordinary men and women everywhere and that they receive and understand the health message, whether related to disease control and immunization, nutrition or maternal and child care.

At the same time, recipient countries should ensure that the maximum benefit is drawn from their own resources, with the ultimate objective of self-sufficiency, while international cooperation for development must be on a scale to meet the challenge. Ultimately, success will depend on the genuineness of human concern about the gross inadequacies of everyday life in many large population groups in the world today, and on whether consciences have been stirred sufficiently to take positive action to improve the situation. The prime objective is to improve the quality of life.