

Lecture Vol. 17 # 3 October 27, 1988 cover

Address

By

C. Everett Koop, MD, ScD

Surgeon General

Of the

U.S. Public Health Service

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Presented at the 40th Anniversary of the World Health Organization
United Nations, New York
October 27, 1988

Two days before addressing the UN General Assembly on October 29, 1988, I had addressed a gathering of public health folks in Washington, DC even though both addresses were laudatory of WHO and its place in the global society, I thought an anniversary as important as the 40th of such a distinguished organization deserved double inclusion in this archive. Whereas, my talk in Washington had been to the Washington family and was of a more intimate nature, on this occasion, I reviewed the history of the founding of WHO and expressed my pleasure of having been associated with it for all the time I had been Surgeon General. (I was on the United States Delegation, even before I was confirmed as Surgeon General, when I carried the title of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, then was Chief Delegate to the World Health Assembly in my role as Director of International Health for the Public Health Service, and sat in for the Assistant Secretary on several occasions at the winter meetings of the Executive Committee of WHO.) Therefore, those in attendance who were representing WHO were indeed professional colleagues, and many of them had become personal friends.

How could anybody be opposed to the powerful concept that emerged during the creation of WHO... "that health, good or ill, could never be purely a national phenomenon." I tried to give chapter and verse how that concept had corrected so many ills and had produced so many improvements, while acknowledging that there was yet much more to do.

I hit the highlights of polio, smallpox eradication, oral hydration therapy, malaria control, WHO's special program for research and training in tropical diseases, health manpower utilization, and the reorientation to a primary health care.

That led to some current comments about the status of the AIDS epidemic... a subject, which I also had the privilege of presenting to the UN General Assembly. On that occasion, two years before, I had expressed the hope that by working together, we might accomplish a safe blood supply for transfusion for all people. I was happy to report that over that past year, HIV screening of blood donors had been initiated in many countries. In some countries it was mandatory. And by the end of 1988, all African countries may well be able to complete HIV screening of blood donors.

It seemed appropriate to close with the thought that only united action by all countries could bring about real and lasting improvements in the health of all people – and that included united action against AIDS, the greatest potential catastrophe on the horizon for health.