INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/163 of 21 December 1993 announced the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People commencing on 10 December 1994. Specialized agencies were requested to consider with governments and indigenous people how they can contribute to the success of the Decade.

The Regional Committee is requested to consider the role it wishes the Regional Office to play in this. Member States are urged, where appropriate, to designate a focal point for indigenous health issues.
1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations recognizes equal participation of all citizens in economic, political and social development as a major contributing factor to harmonious and productive global progress. It has identified several issues that require special attention as the next century approaches. One such issue is the role and involvement of indigenous people in national development.

In recognition of the concern for indigenous people, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, commencing in December 1994. All United Nations institutions and agencies were encouraged to participate in this effort by (1) giving increased priority and resources to improving conditions of indigenous people, particularly those in developing countries; (2) launching special projects, in collaboration with indigenous people, and (3) designating a focal point for coordination with the Centre of Human Rights for activities related to the Decade.

In 1994, the World Health Assembly then adopted resolution WHA47.27 supporting the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, which stated, *inter alia*:

"The Forty-seventh World Health Assembly, ...

1. AGREES that WHO should participate in planning for, and implement the objectives of, the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People;

2. REQUESTS the appropriate regional office to work, along with the governments of the Member States concerned, with indigenous people, including by establishing a core advisory group of indigenous representatives with special knowledge of the health needs and resources of their communities.

3. CALLS on the Director-General:

(1) to increase cooperation between WHO and other organizations of the United Nations system, including the Centre of Human Rights, to help to meet health needs of indigenous people in the context of the Decade;

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(2) to provide Member States with technical support to enable them to accelerate the implementation of their programmes for indigenous people;

(3) to assist governments and indigenous people to address indigenous health needs in a culturally effective manner;

(4) to consider the contribution WHO might make to promoting respect for, and maintenance of, indigenous knowledge, traditions and remedies, in particular, their pharmacopoeia;

(5) to ensure that relevant research projects undertaken by WHO and other specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system are conducted in consultation with, and for the benefit of, indigenous people and communities, such projects being undertaken by indigenous people themselves where appropriate;

4. INVITES Member States with indigenous populations to consider, where appropriate, designating a focal point for cooperation with their communities in all health related decisions that will impact on indigenous people."

This was followed in May 1995 by Health Assembly resolution WHA48.24 (see Annex), which requested the Director-General to report to the Forty-ninth World Health Assembly on WHO's implementation of the earlier resolution, and invited those Member States which had designated a focal point for indigenous health issues, to provide the Director-General with the contact details of the focal point.

2. REGIONAL SITUATION

Indigenous people are the descendants of the first known people in their region or country and typically have different cultural and social patterns and institutions from the more recent immigrants or colonizers. These people frequently do not share equally in the benefits of social and economic developments with the more recent immigrants.

A questionnaire was issued to all countries and areas of the Region; to which most countries responded. Given the above general definition, the only countries which have indigenous people
would be Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and the Philippines. In addition, some countries have minority groups which could be included in this category of concern.

All of the countries acknowledging indigenous peoples also reported very active health programmes, however, noting that there was still more that could be done for that group.

The brief survey indicated that for indigenous peoples to gain a greater share of the nation's social and economic wealth, more comprehensive social integration is required. This cannot be achieved through traditional health interventions. The health sector can, however, play a major role as a promoter and facilitator for this concern, in the context of its concern with human development. This would entail more equal participation as a partner in the overall social, political and economic activities of the community.

3. REGIONAL COMMITTEE

The Regional Committee may wish to discuss the need for the Regional Office to coordinate and facilitate further involvement of countries in the activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and the designation of focal points for indigenous health issues as suggested in resolution WHA47.27.
International Decade of the
World’s Indigenous People

The Forty-eighth World Health Assembly,

Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/163 of 21 December 1993, which proclaimed
the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People commencing on 10 December 1994, and requested
specialized agencies to consider with governments and indigenous people how they can contribute to the
success of the Decade;

Recalling also that United Nations General Assembly resolution 49/214 of 23 December 1994 invited
the specialized agencies to give increased priority and resources to improving the conditions of indigenous
people, with particular emphasis on the needs of those people in developing countries, including by the
preparation of specific programmes of action for the implementation of the goals of the Decade, within their
areas of competence;

Noting that the goal of the Decade is the strengthening of international cooperation for the solution of
problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as health;

Mindful of WHO’s objective of health for all by the year 2000;

Recalling further resolution WHA47.27 concerning WHO’s participation in planning for, and
implementing the objectives of, the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People,

1. REQUESTS the Director-General to report to the Forty-ninth World Health Assembly on WHO’s
implementation of resolution WHA47.27, including measures at the regional level;

2. INVITES those Member States which have designated a focal point for indigenous health issues as
suggested in resolution WHA47.27 to provide the Director-General with the contact details of the focal point.

Twelfth plenary meeting, 12 May 1995
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