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AWARD OF THE WHO HEALTH-FOR-ALL GOLD MEDAL TO DR SIONE TAPA

CITATION

Having participated in the activities of the World Health Organization since 1956, Tonga became a Member on 14 August 1975. Its contribution to the policies and work of the Organization reaches far beyond what might have been expected, and this is due largely to the endeavors of one man - Dr Sione Tapa.

Dr Tapa was born in Nuku'alofa on 30 October 1923. He graduated from the Fiji School of Medicine in 1944, and obtained the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1953 and a Diploma in Public Health from the Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene, London, England, in 1960.

Dr Tapa worked as a medical officer in the Medical Department of Tonga from 1955 to 1956 and as Chief Medical Officer from 1957 to 1970. He has been Minister of Health of Tonga since 15 June 1970, serving concurrently as Minister of Finance from September 1970 to May 1971 and from November 1972 to January 1981.

Dr Tapa was elected President of the Thirtieth World Health Assembly on 3 May 1977. In his first formal address to the Health Assembly he said that economic development meant socioeconomic development and that health could not be dissociated from socioeconomic problems. In the past few years this issue has once again become important in the work of WHO.

Dr Tapa served as Chairman of the WHO Executive Board from 1989 to 1990 and as Chairman of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific from 1982 and 1983. He has taken part in numerous WHO meetings, always with wise and timely comment. Those present in the governing bodies and privileged to take part in the same meetings remember how often his intercession has resolved a difficult moment and allowed the discussion to continue.

Dr Tapa is a gentle man but there can be no doubt about his passionate commitment to social justice and equity. As a result, our Organization has received constant and unequivocal support and encouragement from him in its health for all and primary health care initiatives. It is in recognition of this that the World Health Organization is privileged to present to His Excellency Dr Sione Tapa, Minister of Health of the Kingdom of Tonga, the Health-for-All Gold Medal.

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