

REGIONAL COMMITTEE

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ACCOMMODATION FOR THE WHO REGIONAL OFFICE
FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines, when inviting the Regional Office for the Western Pacific to be situated permanently in Manila, assured the Organization that suitable office accommodation would be provided at the expense of the Government. Although the building furnished by the Government was adequate when the office was first established, this is no longer the case, and as activities expanded the limitations of the present accommodation became more and more apparent. In 1953 a pre-fabricated building had to be added to accommodate the library and the conference room.

In August 1954 the Director-General asked me to develop plans for more adequate office accommodation and to explore possible arrangements with the Host Government. At the same time he informed me that the Secretary-General of the United Nations had requested WHO to act on behalf of the United Nations and other specialized agencies in all deliberations with the Government regarding accommodation. Negotiations were therefore opened with the Government in regard to the erection of a building which would not only house the WHO Regional Office but the other United Nations Specialized Agencies represented in the Philippines. The general requirements of the proposal presented to the Government were as follows:

- (a) a gift of unencumbered land to WHO by the Government;
- (b) an outright gift of about 50% of the cost of the building and fixtures;
- (c) the building costs to be financed by an interest-free loan granted by the Government on the remaining 50% to be repaid by WHO over 30 years;
- (d) the title to the land and the building to be in the name of WHO with the Organization maintaining and servicing the building.

In November 1954 I was informed by the Secretary of Health that the request had been endorsed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and had been referred to the Cabinet. In January 1955, however, an official reply was received from the Government stating that no decision could be taken at the moment in view of the financial commitments involved. The proposal was further considered in February and March 1955 and I was told that the Organization would be notified as soon as a definite decision had been made.

During the Eighth World Health Assembly the matter was raised officially by the Chief of the New Zealand Delegation who urged that the Philippine Government should be approached again with a view to reaching a definite decision. Negotiations were re-opened with the Government and following a meeting of the Cabinet in July 1955 the Secretary of Health informed the Organization that it had been decided to donate a five hectare tract of land in Quezon City to WHO. At the same time the Secretary of Health was appointed as a one-man committee to negotiate details with the Regional Office.

During the negotiations with the Secretary of Health it was learned that Quezon City had been selected for two reasons (a) the Philippine Central Administration will eventually move to Quezon City which will then become the capital city; the move may, however, not be completed for six to ten years and (b) the Government owns a considerable amount of land in this area and the selection and size of the site will present less difficulty.

While there may be certain advantages in having the office situated near the different departments and the central administration of the Government when their transfer to Quezon City eventually takes place, these advantages will be greatly offset by the fact that until this transfer occurs the Regional Office will be a considerable distance outside of Manila. A location in Quezon City will from the very beginning, and even after the Philippine administration has moved, present operational difficulties and increased cost from a regional office point of view. There are at present no hotels in Quezon City, while the distances to the port, airport, banks, travel agencies and other official and commercial enterprises will be greatly increased. Further complications will arise in regard to the arrival of official visitors from abroad, including project staff and fellows in transit, and the regional office staff will also be affected by the transfer.

If the Regional Office should remain in the present building until the Government moves to Quezon City, which according to information received will be from six to ten years, what arrangement could be made to relieve the present over-crowded and unsatisfactory situation?

These problems have been brought to the attention of the Secretary of Health and the possibility of the Government making available a smaller plot of government-owned land in the centre of Manila has been raised. No official reply has so far been received and there is, therefore, no further information to submit to the Committee.