

This Day in History... April 7, 1948

Formation of the World Health Organization

On April 7, 1948, the World Health Organization (WHO) was officially created as a specialized agency of the United Nations.

The idea for this international health organization was first suggested by Dr. Szeming Sze, a Chinese delegate to the 1945 United Nations Conference. While Sze's initial resolution failed, the conference's secretary general Alger Hiss recommended they create a declaration to establish the organization. Sze and his supporters lobbied and succeeded in getting a declaration calling for an international conference on health.

The conference was held the following year. On July 22, all 51 member countries of the UN, as well as 10 other countries, signed the World Health Organization Constitution. This made the WHO the UN's first specialized agency to be supported by every member nation. They specifically chose the word "world" instead of "international" to stress the global nature of the organization. Their goal was, and still is, "...the attainment of all peoples of the highest possible level of health."

The WHO's constitution went into effect on April 7, 1948, when it was ratified by the 26th member state. Since then, April 7 has become known as World Health Day. The World Health Assembly met that year, secured a \$5 million budget, and established its major priorities. The first issues were to reduce the spread of malaria and tuberculosis, improve mother and child health, nutrition, and hygiene.

In 1959 the WHO decided the technology was available to eliminate the terrible disease smallpox. At that time, vaccinations had eliminated smallpox in Europe and North America. In South America, Asia, and Africa vaccinations had brought the disease under control – but cases were still somewhat common. By 1980, the WHO was able to declare that smallpox no longer existed anywhere on earth. A set of "Global Eradication of Smallpox" stamps was issued to commemorate this effort in 1978.

The WHO coordinates international efforts to combat outbreaks of infectious diseases. But much of the group's attention is also given to research and education. This applies not only to diseases, but also in emergency response to both natural and man-made disasters. It helps build better health systems throughout the world. Prevention of disease is the key goal of WHO. It works with governments to provide safe drinking water, adequate sewage disposal, and immunization against childhood diseases. The World Health Organization also helps in medical research.



1956 UN Stamps honoring the WHO



Issued for the opening of the new WHO headquarters in Geneva in 1966.



1972 stamps honoring World Health Day



Stamp marking the 40th Anniversary of the Global Eradication of Smallpox



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Stamp pictures the emblem of the WHO for its role in the fight against malaria.

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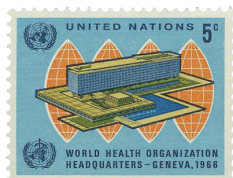
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