

DIRECTOR'S

LETTER

IMMUNIZATION. Ten years have now passed since the launching of the Expanded Program on Immunization in the Americas, an aggressive PAHO/WHO initiative directed against the six major childhood diseases—measles, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, poliomyelitis, and tuberculosis. During that time, thanks largely to the program, the incidence of measles, tetanus, and diphtheria has been halved; pertussis has been reduced by 75%; and tuberculosis has declined steadily at a rate of about 5% per year.

Polio, probably the most dreaded of the childhood diseases, now takes less than a tenth of the victims it claimed a decade ago. However, even this reduced incidence is too high. That is why PAHO—in cooperation with many other agencies including UNICEF, Rotary International, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Inter-American Development Bank—has undertaken to completely eradicate poliomyelitis from this hemisphere by 1990.

When polio is stamped out, it will become the second disease to be eradicated from the Americas. Our region was the first to eliminate smallpox in 1973. Worldwide eradication followed in 1977, making smallpox—which in the early part of this century caused as many as 122,000 cases a year in the Americas—the first disease to be wiped off the face of the earth.

However, smallpox eradication would have been impossible without the dedicated cooperation of all countries of the world and the coordination provided by PAHO and WHO. Thus, it is worth taking the occasion of World Health Day 1987 (see pages 172–184) to stress the benefits of international cooperation in health, to strengthen our support for the 1990 goals of the

Expanded Program on Immunization and the polio eradication initiative, and to reaffirm PAHO's and WHO's commitment to furthering the goal of "Health for All by the Year 2000" through every possible means at our command. □



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