



# XVII Pan American Sanitary Conference

## XVIII Regional Committee Meeting



Washington, D. C., U.S.A.  
September-October 1966

Provisional Agenda Item 21

CSP17/6 (Eng.)  
24 August 1966  
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

### INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION OF HUMAN REMAINS

At its 54th meeting the Executive Committee considered the draft standards for the international transportation of human remains prepared by an Expert Committee which had met in Washington, D.C., from 13-15 December 1965.

The standards were submitted to a Working Party of the Executive Committee composed of representatives of Jamaica, Mexico and Venezuela, which prepared a revised draft. For its part, the Executive Committee, in its eighth plenary session, made a detailed examination of the Working Party's report and approved Resolution XVIII (see Annex I), to the effect that the revised standards should be submitted to the XVII Pan American Sanitary Conference, together with a report on the observations made by the members of the Committee in the course of the discussion of the item. In implementation of the above-mentioned resolution, Document CE54/17 and the corresponding part of Document CE54/27 (see Annexes II and III) are being submitted to the Conference.

A summary of several points which arose during the consideration of the revised standards is given below. In the first place, the Representative of Guatemala pointed out that, according to Regulation 6, where death is due to a quarantinable disease, proper embalming is required, whereas Regulation 2 appears to exclude transportation between frontier districts from that requirement.

The Representative of Panama was of the opinion that Regulation 4, paragraph a), would be incomplete if it did not specify that the official certificate of cause of death should be a medical certificate issued by a medical practitioner. This view was supported by the Representative of Ecuador, who requested the inclusion of a further requirement namely, that the documents should be countersigned and a duly certified certificate of death should be obtained from the Consulate of the country in which the remains were to be buried.

The Observer from Chile made two reservations in the name of his Government: the first, regarding the suppression of the special certificate

for the international transportation of human remains, had already been taken into account in the final draft; and the second, concerning the elimination of paragraph A of Regulation 5 to the effect that prior to transportation of human remains should always be embalmed, no matter how simply.

Finally, the Observer from Peru asked whether the regulations on the international transportation of human remains were to apply solely to the Americas, or if they were to be submitted to the World Health Organization so that they could be examined by that world body.

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The requirement that the death certificate should be issued by a medical practitioner raises insoluble problems in countries which accept certificates issued by persons without medical qualifications. The term used in the draft standards "Official Certificate of Cause of Death" is meant to take into account the various national viewpoints. The same approach was followed as regards the findings of an autopsy which the national legislation of some countries may require to be entered in the certificate of death; it is not believed that it should be made a requirement for the International Transportation of Human Remains.

As to the role of consulates, the requirements of the draft standards appear to be the minimum necessary to ensure adequate protection of both the exit country and the receiving country.

It is likewise thought advisable to leave the definition and delimitation of frontier districts to the countries concerned. If death is due to a quarantinable disease, the case might be covered by the addition of the following clause to Regulation 2: "Except where the cause of death was a quarantinable disease". However, it is felt that there is no need to incorporate it into the revised standards.

Resolution XVIII also recommends to the Pan American Sanitary Conference that it approve the draft standards on the international transportation of human remains and transmit them to the Governments of the Organization so that they may incorporate them into their legislation in such way as they think fit. When considering the revised standards the Conference should take into account the report of the Working Party and the points summarized above which were raised in plenary session at the Executive Committee meeting.

If the Conference endorses the recommendation of the Executive Committee and approves the standards for the international transportation of human remains, the Governments can then translate them into regulations to be applied in whichever way they think most appropriate, that is to say, by enacting a special law or simply including them in their Sanitary Code or issuing regulations or amending the regulations in force, or issuing special instructions or orders concerning the international transportation of human remains.

While it is desirable for the regulations governing the international transportation of human remains to be uniform, they need not have the same legal form. What is important, and this was clearly brought out both by the Expert Committee and the Executive Committee, is that the regulations in force in the countries of the Americas should be the same but that each Government should be free to enact them in whichever way is most appropriate to their legal system.

Attached: Annex I (Resolution XVIII, 54th Meeting of the Executive  
Committee)  
Annex II (Document CE54/17)  
Annex III (Document CE54/27)

ANNEX I

RESOLUTION XVIII OF THE 54th EXECUTIVE  
COMMITTEE

RESOLUTION XVIII

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION OF HUMAN REMAINS

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,

Having considered Document CE54/6 and Add. I on the international transportation of human remains and the draft standards prepared by the Expert Committee and included therein;

Having examined the revised text (Document CE54/17) which was prepared, on the basis of that report, by the Working Group appointed by the Committee to examine the observations submitted by Governments on the draft standards; and

Bearing in mind Resolution XXXVI, paragraph 3, of the XVI Meeting of the Directing Council,

RESOLVES:

1. To transmit to the XVII Pan American Sanitary Conference, XVIII Meeting of the Regional Committee of the World Health Organization for the Americas, the revised text of the draft standards for the international transportation of human remains prepared by the Working Party appointed for that purpose (Document CE54/17), together with the observations of the Members of the Committee during the discussion of the matter.

2. To recommend to the Pan American Sanitary Conference that, bearing in mind the draft standards mentioned in the foregoing paragraph and the observations of the Members of the Executive Committee in the discussion of that subject, it approve the draft standards on the international transportation of human remains and transmit them to the Governments of the Organization so that they may incorporate them into their legislation in such way as they think fit.

(Approved at the eighth plenary session,  
21 April 1966)

ANNEX II

DOCUMENT CE54/17,  
REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE  
INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION OF HUMAN REMAINS



*executive committee of  
the directing council*

PAN AMERICAN  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION

*working party of  
the regional committee*

WORLD  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION



54th Meeting  
Washington, D. C.  
April 1966

Item 11 of the Agenda

CE54/17 (Eng.)  
20 April 1966  
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION OF HUMAN REMAINS

REPORT  
OF THE  
WORKING GROUP

The Working Party composed of the Representatives of Jamaica (Dr. C. C. Wedderburn), Mexico (Dr. Manuel B. Márquez Escobedo), and Venezuela (Dr. Daniel Orellana), to which the Executive Committee at its Third Plenary Session held on 19 April 1966 had entrusted the examination of the Draft Standards for the international transportation of human remains and the observations Governments had submitted thereon, met on 20 April at 12:30 p.m. Dr. John C. Cutler, Deputy Director of PASB, also attended the meeting.

The Working Party made a detailed examination of the Draft Standards prepared by the Experts Committee (which are to be found on pages 7-11 of Annex I of Document CE54/6) and the observations submitted by various Governments. During the examination other observations were made and, finally, it was agreed to prepare a revised text which will embody all the observations accepted. This new text, which is given below, is submitted to the consideration of the Executive Committee. If it is accepted by them, it could be forwarded to the Pan American Sanitary Conference for consideration and approval.

DRAFT STANDARDSDECLARATION

The greater ease of communications today and the considerable increase in tourism make the international transportation of human remains a matter of practical interest that justifies the establishment of uniform standards.

The international transportation of human remains should be simplified so as not to increase the problems of the families with complicated and unnecessary procedures that appear to overlook the moral and social considerations involved in such cases.

It is possible to simplify the administrative procedures involved in obtaining authorization for the international transportation of human remains if it is borne in mind that, contrary to a deep-rooted opinion, a corpse does not constitute a health risk even when death was due to a quarantinable or communicable disease, since its power to infect disappears when it is suitably embalmed.

Embalming might become the general practice in the countries of the Americas since it is the most appropriate method of preserving human remains; however, this in no way implies that other, simpler, and equally effective methods, cannot also be used.

Definitions

Article 1. International transportation of human remains is understood to be the shipment of the body from the country where the death occurred to the country of its final destination after either death or disinterment.

Article 2. The transportation of bodies between frontier districts within 48 hours after death shall not be subject to these standards.

Article 3. For the purpose of these standards an impervious coffin shall be any container or box, of whatever material, which can be hermetically sealed and so maintained by plastic or rubber gasket or by metal or similar material which has been soldered or welded. The body may also be encased in a plastic container which has been sealed by heat or by adhesive materials prior to being placed in a non-impervious coffin.

Documentation

Article 4. For international transportation of human remains, the following documents shall be required:

- a. An official certificate of cause of death issued by the local registrar of death, or similar authority;

- b. A statement by the person authorized to prepare the remains, certified by an appropriate authority, indicating the manner and method in which the body was prepared and indicating that the coffin contains only the body in question and necessary clothing and packing;
- c. A transit permit stating the surname, first name, and age of the deceased person, issued by the competent authority for the place of death, or the space of burial in the case of exhumed human remains, and
- d. Copies of the documentation required under subparagraphs a, b, and c shall accompany the shipment of remains. The outside of the coffin should bear an immovable plaque or other appropriate marking, in a conspicuous place, indicating name, age, and place of final destination of the body.

#### Health Measures

Article 5. The human remains shall be subject to the following measures:

- a. Thorough washing with an effective disinfectant; disinfection of all orifices; packing of all orifices with cotton saturated with an effective disinfectant; wrapping in a sheet saturated with an effective disinfectant; and placing in an impervious coffin; or
- b. Proper embalming (arterial and cavity) and placement in an impervious coffin.

#### Shipment Requirements

Article 6. Human remains prepared for international shipment must be placed in an impervious coffin. Where the cause of death was a quarantinable disease, as defined in the International Sanitary Regulations, the human remains must be embalmed (arterial and cavity) and placed in an impervious coffin.

The impervious coffin must thereupon be hermetically sealed and may be shipped without any other covering (except in the case of shipment by sea), or for protective purposes may be fitted in a wooden box, or one made of other material, so as to prevent movement; or may be wrapped in a specially designed fabric.

#### Transportation by land, air and sea

Article 7. The following regulations shall apply to the transportation by rail:

- a. The impervious coffin may be transported in the baggage compartment of a passenger car.

- b. Each country shall be responsible for fixing the time limit within which the body must be removed at its final destination.

In case of transportation by road the impervious coffin must be conveyed preferably on a closed hearse or failing such, in an ordinary closed van (truck) or automobile, placed in such a way as to prevent movement.

The impervious coffin may be conveyed also in the baggage compartment of a passenger aircraft or in a cargo aircraft and may be equipped with a vent or safety valve provided that precautions are taken to prevent the escape of liquids or noxious gases.

In case of transportation by sea the impervious coffin, in order to preclude movement, must be packed in an ordinary wooden case, or one made of other material, or may be placed in a specially designed fabric container.

#### Common Provision

Article 8. Regardless of the mode of transportation, wreaths, flowers, and other similar funeral articles may be sent with the coffin only when it is permitted by the provisions in force in the country to which it is being sent.

#### Final Provisions

Article 9. The above formalities may be reduced either through bilateral agreements or by joint decision in particular cases.

Article 10. The transportation of remains exhumed after the period established in the local provisions in force have elapsed, and the transportation of ashes, shall not be subject to health or other special measures.

ANNEX III

DISCUSSION OF THE WORKING PARTY'S  
REPORT AT THE EIGHTH PLENARY SESSION OF THE  
54th EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (DOCUMENT CE54/27)

Dr. CUTLER (Deputy Director, PASB), introducing Item 11 -International Transportation of Human Remains- stated that the problem had increased in importance of late because of the tremendous growth of the tourist trade. Governments had become cognizant of the need to simplify the procedures for the international transportation of human remains since the U.S. Government in 1964 requested the Organization to look into possible solutions. To that end, in December 1965, the Director convened an Expert Committee, the report of which appeared in Document CE54/6. Important assistance was received from Mr. William Annetti, Chief of the Technical Section of the Memorial Division of the U.S. Department of the Army, and probably the world's leading authority on the subject.

The Expert Committee was composed of public health authorities and also of customs authorities who had expressed their pleasure at being able to discuss the problem with their health colleagues. The Technical Unit on Tourism of the O.A.S. had also given assistance. The purpose of the Committee was to simplify the procedures for the international transportation of human remains and, on the basis of previous experience, such as that of the League of Nations in 1937, the Committee drew up a set of draft regulations. The draft was circulated to all governments in the Hemisphere with a request for comments; and nine of the governments and four of the territories had expressed full agreement with the draft as it stood.

As to the implementation of the regulations in the Region, all the governments, with the exception of 4, favored the simple procedure of adopting the draft regulations as part of their health code or ordinances.

Dr. WEDDERBURN (Jamaica), submitting the report of the Working Party appointed at the Third Session (Document CE54/17), stated that the Working Party had made a detailed examination of the draft regulations prepared by the Expert Committee and of the comments of the governments. As a result it had prepared a revised text embodying the observations it had accepted.

Dr. AGUILAR (Guatemala) pointed out that in the Declaration it was stated that even when death was due to a quarantinable or communicable disease a corpse did not constitute a health risk since its power to infect disappeared when it was suitably embalmed. Accordingly, Regulation 6 provided that where the cause of death was a quarantinable disease, as defined in the International Sanitary Regulations, the human remains had to be embalmed and placed in an impervious coffin. However, Regulation 2 stated that the transportation of bodies between frontier districts within 48 hours after death was not to be subject to the standards. In those cases Regulation 7, dealing with the conditions for the transportation of coffins by land or sea, the commonest forms of transportation between frontier districts would not apply either. In conclusion, the meaning of the term "frontier districts" was not very clear, since in some small countries almost the entire national territory could be regarded as a frontier district.

Dr. CUTLER (Deputy Director, PASB), in reply to the points raised by Dr. Aguilar, stated that the Declaration did not have the force of a regulation and merely mentioned embalming to lower fear of disease.

As to how a frontier district was defined, that would depend primarily on the two countries concerned. Many Governments had already worked out a modus operandi to handle the problem, and the Committee wished to give formal recognition to that fact in the draft standards and not to complicate matters further. As stated in Regulation 9, the formalities could be reduced either through bilateral agreement or joint decision.

With respect to certification of death and medical certification, the Expert Committee had been cognizant of the differences between countries as to the authorities competent to sign death certificates and the fact that many countries accepted death certificates issued by non-medical persons. Death might also occur in localities where no physician was available and lay officials were legally authorized to sign death certificates. Not wishing to unnecessarily complicate the transportation of human remains when there was no risk to public health, the Committee had used the wording "an official certificate of cause of death".

With regard to autopsies, if they were required by national legislation for deaths occurring under certain circumstances, the autopsy findings might appropriately be included in death certificates. However, the Expert Committee did not feel that there should be any international requirement regarding autopsy.

Furthermore, Dr. Cutler referred to the consular question raised and stated that the intent had been to keep legal actions to a minimum since they often involved very drawnout processes, sometimes even requiring the intervention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The feeling had been that the wording proposed by the Committee would meet the minimum standards of consular officials and provide adequate protection for both the shipping and the receiving country.

The final point -transportation between frontier districts of the bodies of persons who might have died of quarantinable diseases- could be dealt with by the addition of the following clause at the end of Regulation 2: "except where the cause of death was a quarantinable disease".

Dr. CALVO (Panama) stated that in his opinion the revised draft was almost perfect and should be approved. However, in his view the text of Regulation 4, paragraph A, was still incomplete, since it did not specify that the death certificate should be a medical certificate issued by a physician.

Dr. YEPEZ (Ecuador) endorsed the observations of Dr. Calvo and added that, as far as documents were concerned, a paragraph should, in his view, be added to Regulation 4 making it compulsory to have the

documents checked and to obtain a duly authenticated death certificate from the consulate of the country in which the human remains were to be buried. That suggestion had been made by the Director General of Public Health of Ecuador but it had not been included in the replies from the various countries, probably because it had been sent too late.

Dr. JURICIC (Observer, Chile) stated that his government had sent a reply on the 21 March through the Zone Office but that it had not reached Washington owing to serious difficulties with the post. Nevertheless, he wished to state that the Ministry of Public Health of Chile agreed with the documents submitted except for two points: the first, referring to the suppression of special authorization for the transport of human remains, had already been taken into account in the final draft; the other was that paragraph A of Regulation 5 should be suppressed. In the opinion of the Government of Chile human remains should not be transported internationally unless they had been embalmed, no matter how simply.

Dr. QUIROS (Observer, Peru) asked whether the regulations for the international transportation of human remains were to apply solely in the Americas or whether they were to be submitted to the World Health Organization so that they could be examined by that world body.

Dr. CUTLER (Deputy Director, PASB) replying to the point raised by Dr. Quiros, stated that the standards might first be tried out in the region of the Americas which was more homogeneous and smaller than other world areas. If they were found to be of practical value, they could be taken up through WHO, if the Governments so desired, for application throughout the world.

Dr. CALVO (Panama) emphasized that it was essential that the official documents should be accompanied by a medical certificate of cause of death.

Dr. HORWITZ (Director, PASB) suggested that the various observations made by the members of the Executive Committee should be recorded and reported to the Conference.

Dr. SUTTER (Assistant Director, PASB) read out the following draft resolution on the international transportation of human remains:

"THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,

Having considered Document CE54/6 and Add. I on the international transportation of human remains and the draft standards prepared by the Expert Committee and included therein;

Having examined the revised text (Document CE54/17 which was prepared, on the basis of that report, by the Working Group appointed by the Committee to examine the observations submitted by Governments on the draft standards; and

Bearing in mind Resolution XXXVI, paragraph 3, of the XVI Meeting of the Directing Council,

RESOLVES:

1. To transmit to the XVII Pan American Sanitary Conference, XVIII Meeting of the Regional Committee of the World Health Organization for the Americas, the revised text of the draft standards for the international transportation of human remains prepared by the Working Party appointed for that purpose (Document CE54/17), together with the observations of the Members of the Committee during the discussion of the matter.

2. To recommend to the Pan American Sanitary Conference that bearing in mind the draft standards mentioned in the foregoing paragraph and the observations of the Members of the Executive Committee in the discussion of that subject, it approve the draft standards on the international transportation of human remains and transmit them to the Governments of the Organization so that they may incorporate them into their legislation in such way as they think fit"