Foreword

The Inter-Regional Meeting on Health and Trade: Toward the Millennium Round, arranged by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), WHO Regional Office for the Americas (AMRO), was held from 3 to 5 November 1999 at the PAHO Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The objective of the meeting was to explore possible cooperation mechanisms between the health service and trade sectors, in order to develop health protection and promotion strategies. The meeting was held just prior to the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington. While a new round of comprehensive multilateral trade negotiations was not launched, the WTO did commence mediations in February 2000 to further liberalize trade in services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Discussions on issues specific to trade in health services were thus very timely.

The Health and Trade meeting was a joint WHO-PAHO initiative under the responsibility of the WHO Department of Health in Development, Globalization, Cross-Sectoral and Human Rights Team, and the PAHO Regional Program on Public Policy and Health, Division of Health and Human Development. Participants included experts on trade and health issues from nine countries: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Indonesia, Switzerland, Thailand, and the United States. Also participating in the meeting were representatives of seven international organizations: the WHO Headquarters Secretariat, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO), the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO), the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO), PAHO (AMRO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the WTO, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

Dr. George A. O. Alleyne, Director of PAHO, formally opened the meeting, welcoming its participants on behalf also of the WHO Director General Dr. Gro Harlem Bruntland, and of Eva Wallstam, at the time Director of the Program on Health and Development. Then Dr. Nick Drager of WHO and Dr. Cesar Vieira of PAHO led the participants in a review of the meeting’s objectives and agenda, which comprised three major blocks. The first block was dedicated to the presentation and discussion of five thematic issues related to trade and health. Dr. Carlos Correa, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, presented an overview of public health issues and multilateral trade agreements. Then Mrs. Simonetta Zarrilli, UNCTAD, spoke about the export of health services from the perspective of development. They were
followed by Mr. Henryk Kierzkowski, Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, who gave a talk on public health in an open economy. To complete this section of the program, Mr. Paulo Mendes, of the International Finance Corporation, spoke about foreign direct investment and Mr. Rudolf Adlung, WTO, addressed his organization's perspective on trade in health services.

The second block concentrated on regional and country viewpoints as related to trade in health services. Ms. Karin Timmermans, SEARO, discussed the South-East Asia outlook. She was followed by expositions on the views of Thailand and Indonesia presented, respectively, by Dr. Wattana S. Janjaroen, Chulalongkorn University, and Mr. Dono Widiaymoko, University of Indonesia. Then, Dr. Cesar Vieira of PAHO offered an overview of the Americas based on a paper prepared by Dr. Ellen Wasserman with the assistance of Mr. Santiago Cornejo. This was followed by the positions of Brazil, Chile, the United States, and Canada delineated correspondingly by Mrs. Simonetta Zarrilli, UNCTAD; Mr. Francisco Leon, ECLAC; Mr. Bernard Ascher, Office of the United States Trade Representative, and Mr. Jake Vellinga, Health Canada. Finally, Dr. Belgacem Sabri, EMRO, spoke about the Eastern Mediterranean standpoint in general.

Four working groups comprised the third block, which dealt with the following topics: a positive multilateral trade agenda for developing countries; training the public health community on trade and health issues; research priorities at global, regional, and national levels; and country-situation analysis. Chaired by Dr. Drager and Dr. Vieira, the final plenary session was devoted to the presentation and discussion of working group reports.

This meeting made plain that unless the health and trade sectors cooperate with each other, health priorities will not be properly taken into account by the trade agreements currently under negotiation. In addition to being urgently needed, this cooperation is potentially feasible despite the gaps in knowledge and experience about trade and health service issues still prevailing at country, regional, and global levels. The conclusions and recommendations made by the meeting's participants offer reasonable alternatives for dealing with health priorities within the context of multilateral trade agreements.

With support from the sister organizations that attended the Washington meeting, WHO and PAHO will continue backing their Member Countries so that they will achieve the mutually beneficial relationship that can be forged between the health services and trade sectors, with the dual aim of improving the framework within which these services are provided and ensuring equitable access to them.

This publication gathers some of the papers presented at the Inter-Regional Meeting on Health and Trade: Toward the Millennium Round as well as a paper on trade and health services contributed by Rupa Chanda, and one from Dr. Hédi Achouri, Ministry of Health of Tunisia, about health services in that country. Also included are general conclusions and recommendations from the meeting.

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