

Foreword

In today's convulsively changing world, scientific advances, political mutations, profit maximizations, social interventions, and human interpretations are producing new, and often confusing, perceptions of health and disease, to the extent that one wonders if such primary human aspirations as equity, well-being, and freedom from suffering are being forgotten. What *are* often forgotten are the fundamental principles of the World Health Organization. As Milan Kundera has put it so poignantly, "The struggle against human suppression is the struggle between memory and forgetfulness." In this context I believe that the many who over and over again tend to belittle WHO's constitutional definition of health have forgotten its innate significance and continuing pertinence: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This definition is immediately followed by the following injunction: "The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion political belief, economic or social condition." Let me also remind the forgetful about the link between the inspirational and practical in that the WHO Constitution in Article 1 states: "The objective of the World Health Organization shall be the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health." Perhaps a vision of ethics, of equity, of happiness and achievable well-being, that one of the authors of this book calls eudaemonia.

I see startling patterns of inequities in the health scores throughout the world. I am not talking of the first or second or third or fourth world — I am talking about ONE WORLD — the only one we have got to share and care for. And I continue to support the resolve to provide levels of health that will allow ALL PEOPLE of this ONE WORLD to lead socially and economically productive lives. For I believe that health can truly form a leading edge for social justice, especially when we are dealing with situations where the basic issue is survival, where people are trapped — as millions indeed are — in the vicious circle of extreme poverty, ignorance, and

apathy. WHO's morally binding international contract of Health for All and its integral strategy of Primary Health Care do, I believe, shift health control towards people's own commitment and participation, implying profound social reforms in health, with much more social justice and community empowerment. Health may not be everything, but without health there is very little well-being.

There have been many books and reports in recent years dealing with these and other global problems in health. This book selectively discusses, in the form of scholarly chapters, a few critical issues: the fundamental historical, political, and socio-economic aspects of health in the world at large; the different views about values, systems, and technologies; the dynamics of global health; how to face the human rights challenges; how to cope with epidemics and pandemics; how to interpret the changing age structures; how to remedy food and nutrition problems in most countries. All these, and challenging new analytical methods and tools that confront the scholar. These are personal, social, economic, scientific, and worldwide issues replete with controversy that this book confronts boldly from different — and sometimes heterodox and conflicting — perspectives. It provides valid and mature insights towards understanding much of the global dimensions of health. It is certainly worthwhile reading and digesting.

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