World Health Day 7 April 1976

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The International Association for the Prevention of Blindness was an organization of long standing well known to all ophthalmologists. It issued a journal, its executive body met annually, and a General Assembly was held every four years at the time of the International Congress. Some had adverse views on its constitution; some were critical of its activities—or lack of them. In 1968, the President, Professor Franceschetti, died and, after a short period when the Association was under the Presidency of A. E. Maumenee, Gunnar von Bahr was elected President. He at once reorganized the Association, and the constitution and by-laws were completely revised. In Paris in May 1974, the General Assembly met, and fundamental changes were decided upon; these were necessary to embrace a more comprehensive range of powers, and institute legal machinery to hold and administer substantial funds of a multidisciplinary membership within which the main authority should rest with national delegations. Sir John Wilson, Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, was elected President, and Gunnar von Bahr Vice-President, his election ensuring liaison with the International Council. W. J. Holmes (USA) and W. S. Hunter (Canada) retained their offices of Secretary-General and Treasurer respectively. The organization was renamed the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, a happy change which, although retaining the old initials, indicated the difference between the old and the new organization.

The first meeting of the Executive Board was held in Puerto Rico in April 1975. Perhaps its most important action was the decision to establish national committees throughout the world; this has already been achieved in 42 countries, including our own. The Agency works in official relationship with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and FAO and has contact with all related UN mechanisms. Under its new constitution, which came into force on 1 January 1975, the Agency represents a partnership between the organizations concerned internationally with ophthalmology and with the rehabilitation of the blind. This collaboration is reproduced at the national level with

additional links with other scientific disciplines and community service organizations.

At the 28th World Health Assembly held in Geneva in May 1975, an important resolution was adopted, urging all governments to intensify action for the prevention of blindness and, on World Health Day (7 April 1976), to celebrate internationally the theme 'Foresight Prevents Blindness'. One of the chief objects of this communication was to draw attention to this important date.

The Priorities and Projects Committee of the Agency met in Washington in November 1975, and this country was represented by Michael Roper-Hall, chairman of the group on ocular trauma. The British National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness is this country's link with the Agency and consists of representatives of the organizations concerned nationally with blindness and its prevention and of the responsible government departments. Two subcommittees are charged with a national campaign of fund raising (probably to be concentrated annually into a prevention of blindness week) and with the formulation of priorities for national and international action.

There is no need to list for ophthalmologists the principal causes of blindness and their distribution and incidence, nor to recite the formidable statistics of world blindness. One may be allowed, however, to submit the above record, and to ask all to keep informed of developments, and to lend support to the campaign, especially in relation to World Health Day.

A report on mobilization of resources submitted to the Executive Board at Puerto Rico ended thus: 'Our objective is this: In every donor country during 1976 that every family should be asked—in thanksgiving for sight—to give \$10 to save the sight of its fellow countrymen or of the millions in the third world. If we can raise this campaign to that degree of universal appeal, the result could be spectacular'.

Information about the Agency and about the British National Committee can be obtained from the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, Commonwealth House, Haywards Heath, Sussex RH16 3AZ, England.