

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) is one of the sixteen specialized agencies brought into relationship with the United Nations by an official agreement. It is one of the four 'large' specialized agencies, together with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Organization for Food and Agriculture (FAO) and the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO).

As for the other organizations of the "United Nations Common System", the creation of WHO in 1948, as an independent intergovernmental organization, with its own governing bodies, its budget and its secretariat, constituted the concrete implementation of the functionalist theory.¹ According to this theory, the division of the planet between sovereign and independent countries, which has been at the origin of numerous wars, has become inadequate. Hence the need of functional *ad hoc* arrangements of networks of new relationships between nations based on common interests. The creation of functional international organizations, specialized in a particular field of activity, would create transnational professional communities which would break, or erode progressively national sovereignties and would preserve peace. Economic, social, cultural and technical functional activities would develop separately from politics. Cooperation between nations, outside of the traditional diplomatic framework and of contingencies of power and prestige, would bring about the withering of the interstate system.

In this sense, WHO's Constitution affirms that "The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and States".²

Even if the functionalist vision has remained a utopia, it has influenced the founders and the leaders of the Organization, who have tried, with more or less success, to keep it away from international political conflicts, which were to be dealt with by the political arm of the system, i.e. the UN itself. WHO's objective is "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible

1. For an assessment of functionalism, see International Organizations, A. LeRoy Bennett, Prentice-Hall, 3rd Ed., 1984, pp. 290-292, 372-373.

2. World Health Organization - Basic Documents, Thirty-ninth Ed., Geneva, 1992, p.1-3.