

Smallpox eradication: destruction of variola virus stocks

The Fifty-second World Health Assembly,

Recalling that resolution WHA49.10 recommended that the remaining stocks of variola virus should be destroyed on 30 June 1999 after a final decision had been taken by the Health Assembly;

Having considered the report of the Secretariat on destruction of the variola virus stocks, as well as the report of the January 1999 meeting of the WHO ad hoc Committee on Orthopox Virus Infections;

Affirming that the final elimination of all variola virus remains the goal of the World Health Organization and all Member States;

Noting that recent scientific reviews of the smallpox issue have presented arguments that retention of the variola virus stocks for the present would permit research for public health purposes, including the development of antiviral agents as well as an improved and safer vaccine;

Having noted a lack of consensus among Member States as to whether the Assembly should proceed to authorize destruction of the variola virus stocks on 30 June 1999, as proposed by the Assembly in 1996,

1. **STRONGLY REAFFIRMS** the decision of previous Assemblies that the remaining stocks of variola virus should be destroyed;
2. **DECIDES** to authorize temporary retention up to not later than 2002 and subject to annual review by the World Health Assembly of the existing stocks of variola virus at the current locations - the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, United States of America, and the Russian State Centre for Research on Virology and Biotechnology, Koltsovo, Novosibirsk Region, Russian Federation - for the purpose of further international research into antiviral agents and improved vaccines, and to permit high-priority investigations of the genetic structure and pathogenesis of smallpox;
3. **FURTHER DECIDES** that any such research shall be funded by Member States or by other national or international bodies and shall be conducted in an open and transparent manner only with the agreement and under the control of WHO;

4. REQUESTS the Director-General:

- (1) to appoint a new group of experts which will establish what research, if any, must be carried out in order to reach global consensus on the timing for the destruction of existing variola virus stocks, and will:
 - (a) advise WHO on all actions to be taken with respect to variola;
 - (b) develop a research plan for priority work on the variola virus;
 - (c) devise a mechanism for reporting of research results to the world health community;
 - (d) outline an inspection schedule to confirm the strict containment of existing stocks and to assure a safe and secure research environment for work on the variola virus, and make recommendations on these points;
- (2) to facilitate the full participation in the work of the new group of experts of a limited number of scientists and public health experts from Member States of each of the WHO regions;
- (3) to report the initial recommendations and plans of the group of experts, including relevant costs for WHO, to the Executive Board at its 106th session in May 2000, providing that external funding has been made available for this purpose;
- (4) to present a detailed report, including progress of the research programme on the smallpox virus, to the Executive Board and Health Assembly as soon as possible, but in any event not later than 2002, and to make recommendations to the Executive Board and Health Assembly regarding their proposals for the date of final destruction of the remaining stocks of variola virus.

Ninth plenary meeting, 24 May 1999
A52/VR/9

= = =