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SPEECH BY THE OBSERVER FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND THE PAN AMERICAN HEALTH BUREAU

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The World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Bureau have followed with great interest the progress of the meetings of the ECLA and wish to express their appreciation of the ECLA's work and reaffirm their resolute intent to afford technical co-operation.

The noble purpose of your Commission - to raise the level of economic activity in Latin America - is closely linked with the aims of these institutions, namely the promotion and co-ordination of the efforts of the countries of the Western Hemisphere to combat disease, prolong life and improve the well-being of the inhabitants.

Health is not merely the antithesis of disease and human suffering, but the state of full physical, mental and social well-being and, as such, is the fundamental requisite for the progress and economic development of the peoples, as well as one of the essential rights of every human being, without distinction of race, religion, geographical location, political ideology or economic or social status.

This assembly has discussed the safeguarding of private, national, foreign and other capital, and we should like in addition to ask special consideration for human capital,

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not on sentimental grounds, but as an element in every country's economy, an asset in its production and consumption.

Nations judge each other's worth not only from their material resources, the diversity of their raw materials and the volume of their exports and imports, but also from the quality and number of their inhabitants. Material wealth is of no value without a healthy, strong population capable of turning it to account.

A nation's main source of prosperity and wealth is its capacity to work, and that can only be wholly assured when the human machine is in perfect health and full vigour. Already at the First Session of this Commission the WHO observer had the opportunity of touching upon the doctrine of the close relationship between health and economics, pointing out that "if the life of American man were extended by five years of activity, if the general mortality rate were reduced by five per thousand, and if absence from work diminished by ~~twenty~~ per cent - figures which could all be reached - at least ten thousand million dollars would be saved annually in Latin America, taking the average annual value of a man's work as five hundred dollars".

The economic conditions of a region are closely bound up with its environmental development and with the individual and collective health of its inhabitants. Hence economic utilization of the American soil is largely dependent upon first making it healthy to live on. As clear proof of the economic benefits resulting from health programmes, many of which have been carried out under the

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auspices of the Health Bureau, the following few examples may be mentioned:

- eradication of yellow fever in the towns, by means of a continent-wide campaign against the aedes aegypti, its urban carrier, and mass protection by vaccination of the populations exposed to the danger. Almost complete success has been achieved in the towns and work in extensive forest areas has been made possible, enabling a decisive saving of life in these areas and a fundamental saving as regards their economic value;

- the elimination of malaria and the drainage of many districts in America, making it possible to transform infested areas into flourishing localities now engaged in important agricultural work. Examples are: the River Basin in Brazil, Tucuman in Argentina, Chancay and Chimboto in Peru, Arica and Tarapaca in Chile, etc.;

- eradication of the anopheles gambiae in the northeast of Brazil, a terrible malaria carrier which not only threatened that area with depopulation but America as a whole with a very real catastrophe;

- the scheme for the control of onchocerciasis, worked out by our Bureau in co-operation with certain Governments of America, and considered fundamental to the economic development of that area;

- the schemes for controlling ankylostomiasis in Panama, Brazil and other countries, with the co-operation of the Rockefeller Foundation, have made possible the cultivation of extensive agricultural areas and the recovery of populations from the listlessness and physical incapacity which characterize that disease;

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- the schemes for the drainage of the Amazon Basin and the valley of the Rio Doce, in which the Institute of Inter-American Affairs is taking an active part, are decisive experiments for the economic future of America.

These examples clearly indicate the importance to the economic system of an improvement in environmental conditions. Health and economics are indissolubly bound up with each other and it is necessary to emphasize "that economic development without adequate health measures is necessarily incomplete and that it is the right of the people to expect that proper health measures be taken concurrently with such economic efforts".

In the Working Committees of this Commission the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Bureau had the opportunity of offering some concrete observations on technical assistance and other pertinent matters. These institutions wish to express the desire that their collaboration with the ECLA may be strengthened and maintained, so that economic efforts and efforts to improve the health and well-being of Latin America may be co-ordinated.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
