

(Smallpox: The Death of a Disease, p.248-249)

THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY—1980

On May 8, 1980, a special plenary meeting took place at the World Health Assembly in Geneva. Health ministers from nations around the world attended. Fenner presented the final report of the global commission and its recommendations. A formal resolution and recommendations were adopted by acclamation and signed by representatives of each of the governments. The first two recommendations were of special significance:

The Thirty-third World Health Assembly, on this the eighth day of May 1980:

1. Declares solemnly that the world and all its peoples have won freedom from smallpox, which was a most devastating disease sweeping in epidemic form through many countries since earliest time, leaving death, blindness and disfigurement in its wake and which only a decade ago was rampant in Africa, Asia and South America;
2. Expresses its deep gratitude to all nations and individuals who contributed to the success of this noble and historic endeavor;
3. Calls this unprecedented achievement in the history of public health to the attention of all nations, which by their collective action have freed mankind of this ancient scourge and, in so doing, have demonstrated how nations working together in a common cause may further human progress.

Recommendation: Smallpox vaccination should be discontinued in every country except for investigators at special risk.

Recommendation: International certificates of vaccination against smallpox should no longer be required of any travelers.

It was a moving ceremony and a memorable moment, but I felt an odd sense of loss. Never again could I expect to share with so many colleagues from so many countries the day-to-day excitement, stress, anxiety, elation, and satisfaction in achievement that had been our common experience for more than a decade.