

## THE ALEXANDRIA REGIONAL HEALTH BUREAU

### ITS ORIGIN AND HISTORY

Following upon the signature of the International Sanitary Convention of Paris, 1926, the Office International d'Hygiène publique, in virtue of the authority conferred on it by Article 7 of the said Convention, undertook to make the necessary arrangements with international sanitary organization with the object of utilising them as Regional Bureaux of epidemiological intelligence.

The President of the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt, one of the Members of the Egyptian Delegation at the Paris Conference of 1926 was invited by the President of the Permanent Committee and the Director of the Office to attend the Session of April 1926 of the Permanent Committee with a view to discussing and defining what part the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt could assume under the terms of the new Convention in the collection and transmission to the authorities concerned of the various epidemiological information provided for in the International Sanitary Convention.

The President of the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt, who was present at the April Session, was requested to submit to the Office a short note containing proposals as to what the Quarantine Board could eventually undertake. In reply to this request, a Note was submitted, circulated and discussed at the meeting of the 28th April 1926 of the Office International d'Hygiène publique.

At the ordinary Session of November 1927 of the Permanent Committee of the Office, the President of the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt submitted the draft of the Arrangement which had been established in agreement with the Director of the Office International d'Hygiène publique, whereby the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt would act as a Regional Bureau for the Near East, and would exercise towards its participating countries, under the responsibility of the Office, the duties delegated to the latter by the International Sanitary Convention.

The proposed Arrangement was unanimously adopted, as mentioned above, at the meeting of November 9, 1927 and by the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt at its meeting of February 7, 1928.

As a result of this Arrangement, the Quarantine Board became the official centre for the Near East for the exchange of information relating to epidemic diseases and its work would commence as soon as the 1926 Convention comes into force.

Although the Regional Bureau worked temporarily though officially, as from the 5th May, 1928, its formal existence began with the ratification of the 1926 Convention, that is to say on May 23, 1928.

At that date the countries participating in the Bureau included: Syria, French Somaliland, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine and Iraq. Subsequently the adhesions of the following Governments were obtained: Transjordan, Aesean Islands, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Cyprus, Malta.

The Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt carried out the duties of a Regional Bureau of Epidemiological Information for the Near East until the abolition of the Board which occurred in 1939.

As a result of the Conference held in Paris in October 1938, the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt which was utilized by the Office International d'Hygiène publique as a Regional Bureau of Epidemiological Intelligence for the Near East, was suppressed and its activities transferred to the Egyptian Ministry of Public Health.

The suppression of the Board raised the question of the future of the Regional Bureau for the Near East.

The Permanent Committee of the Office International d'Hygiène publique was anxious that this suppression should not involve that of the Regional Bureau, as the agreement concluded by the Office International d'Hygiène publique with the Quarantine Board for its utilization as a Regional Bureau had given full satisfaction, not only as far as the participating countries were concerned, but to the other countries likewise. Besides, it was considered that it was important as regards the information on the Pilgrimage.

In order to preserve the advantages derived from the Regional Bureau the following deliberation was adopted by the International Conference of 1938:

"In order to maintain these advantages, the best solution would be to accept the obliging offer of the Egyptian Government to assume the duties of that organism of which the Egyptian Government would appoint the Director and, on the other side, would constitute a Commission including technical representatives of the affiliated countries. The President of the Permanent Committee and the Director General of the Office International d'Hygiène publique would be invited by the Egyptian Government to attend the meetings.

The Commission would elect its President.

It will hold a meeting in the Head Office of the Bureau during the year 1939, and will fix at each session the date of the next session, in case of necessity, it will hold a session whenever it will be requested by the Egyptian Government, or by at least three of its Members.

Once that Organization established, it will work as the Regional Bureau of the Office International d'Hygiène publique, on the basis of an agreement to be established in virtue of Article 7 of the 1926 Convention, similar to the agreement now in force. The organism thus created will have the same international character as the existing Bureau.

The Bureau will work for a period of five years and will continue to work by tacit reconduction."

The organization contemplated at the above Conference was not established on account of the outbreak of hostilities in 1939.

Furthermore, owing to war time conditions, it was decided towards the end of December 1940, to suspend the working of the Regional Bureau of Epidemiological Information for the Near East as a dependency of the Office International d'Hygiène publique, and to replace it by a special war time service under the Quarantine Department of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Health.

This service which included at the beginning the following countries formerly participating in the Regional Bureau, viz, Egypt, Cyprus, Iraq, Malta, Palestine, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Transjordan, received the following adhesions: Gibraltar, Aden, Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, former Italian Colonies in East Africa, British Somaliland, Nigeria, Gold Coast, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Syria and Lebanon, French Equatorial Africa, Belgian Congo, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.

As a result of the end of hostilities, the Regional Bureau of Epidemiological information for the Near East resumed its normal activities.

In 1945 was created the Pan Arab League, which includes Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

On April 6, 1946, the Committee of that League decided to utilize the Alexandria Regional Bureau as a Sanitary Regional Bureau for the countries associated in the Pan Arab League, with the mission to communicate with the similar international organizations in the world for the purpose of exchanging epidemiological intelligence; the Bureau is entitled to accept the adhesion of other adjacent countries if such adhesion is in accordance with its purpose, on the condition of the approval of the League Committee.

The Bureau will be named:

PAN ARAB REGIONAL HEALTH BUREAU.

As a temporary measure the new Bureau is working on the same lines as those defined in the agreement between the Conseil Sanitaire Maritime and Quarantenaire d'Egypte and the Office International d'Hygiène publique drawn up in 1928.

ACTIVITIES OF THE REGIONAL BUREAU  
NOTIFICATIONS

1. Notification by telegram to the associated countries, the Office International d'Hygiène publique (now the World Health Organization) and the other Regional Bureaux, the information received from the associated countries under Articles 1 and 6 (3°) of the International Sanitary Convention, 1926.
2. The notifications received under Articles 1 and 6 (3°) above received from the associated countries are transmitted by wire to the Office International d'Hygiène publique (now to the World Health Organization) and the other Regional Bureaux.
3. The information received under Article 2 of the Convention, when it is not part of the notifications received under Article 1 and do not necessitate a transmission by telegram, are communicated to the authorities mentioned under Paras. 1 and 2 above, by post.
4. Weekly telegram of cases and deaths (Article 4 of the Convention). The other information provided for in Article 4 of the Convention is communicated by post.
5. Transmission of the information received under Article 6 (rat plague) by wire or by letter to the authorities mentioned in Paras. 1 and 2.
6. The notifications received under Article 12 of the Convention - notification of the cessation of the infection - are transmitted by wire to the World Health Organization and the Regional Bureaux, and by wire or by letter to the associated countries.
7. The notifications received under Article 16 of the Convention regarding the application of measures against arrivals from infected localities or the withdrawal thereof, are communicated by telegram to the World Health Organization and the Regional Bureaux, and the participating countries concerned.

Code: The code used for these notifications is the AA Cable code.

## Pilgrimage

### Notifications

(a) Reception of notification from the affiliated countries of the departure of a pilgrim ship from their country and transmission to the associated countries and the Singapore Bureau,

(b) Notification to the associated countries by wire of the existence of infectious diseases at Tor among their nationals.

(c) Notification to the associated countries by wire of the departure from Tor of ships transporting their nationals.

### Pilgrimage Report

Up to 1939, the Regional Bureau of Alexandria collected the reports of the countries participating in the pilgrimage, including the countries of the Near East, Kamaran Quarantine Station, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and printed them in a volume which was distributed to all countries through the Office International d'Hygiène publique. The report included chapters on the work carried out at Tor Station, the work done by the Bacteriological Laboratory at Tor, the work carried out at Kamaran Quarantine station.

### Publications.

The information collected by the Regional Bureau for the Near East was gathered in a weekly printed Bulletin entitled "Bulletin Quarantenaire" in addition to the daily stenciled notifications.

The Bulletin was suppressed in 1940 and replaced by a weekly epidemiological stenciled bulletin.

### Broadcast

The information collected from the associated countries is weekly broadcasted through Abu Zabal station, near Cairo, every Wednesday at 8 GMT on a wavelength of 25.189 metres, frequency 11930 kilocycles.

The message is transmitted in clear.

Transmitter call sign: SUW.

CONFERENCES - 1928

With a view to settling a considerable number of working details, it was decided to call a conference of the Sanitary Authorities of the participating countries. The conference had an unofficial character, its object was to fix the working details on the basis of the principles already laid down in the new Convention. The program with which the Conference would deal was the following :

1. To fix the details necessary for the working of the Regional Bureau in conformity with the terms of the Arrangement drawn up between the Office International d'Hygiène publique and the Sanitary Maritime and Quarantine Board of Egypt. It was deemed necessary that - in order to fulfil the mission entrusted to the Quarantine Board by the Office International d'Hygiène publique - a personal exchange of views between the representatives of the Health services of the participating countries should take place to discuss;
2. The nature of the code to be used for the exchange of telegraphic communications;
3. The use of wireless for the same purpose;
4. The synchronization of the dates of publication of the epidemiological bulletins in the various participating countries;
5. The arrangement to define the nature of information to be exchanged as regards the movement of pilgrims - to settle practical questions in connection with the measurement of pilgrim ships.

In order to facilitate the discussions two conferences were arranged. The first one was held at Alexandria for the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean basin and Iraq, from March 26th to 28th, 1928. It was attended by a delegate for Cyrenaica, two for Egypt, two for Iraq, one for Palestine, one for the States of Syria, Lebanon, Alaouites and Djebel Druze.

The second conference for the countries bordering on the Red Sea was held at Erkevit ( Sudan ) on April 30 - May 1, 1928 which was attended by Delegates for Eritrea, French Somaliland, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Egypt.

Alexandria Conference - March 26-28, 1928

The resolutions taken at this conference may be summarized as follows:

Plague: As regards notifications of first cases of plague, a notification will be made by telegram on the occurrence of a first case of human or rat plague after the locality has been declared free - as regards ports and great centres.

As regards rural circumscriptions a telegraphic notification is made on the occurrence of a case after a period of six months. There is no necessity for a special notification by telegram when plague appears in a new circumscription contiguous to an infected circumscription. A special telegram must be sent in the case of pneumonic plague.

(b) The detailed information provided for in Article 2 of the Convention will be sent by wire in case of a new epidemic largely diffused occurring in a port or a great city, or in case of occurrence of pneumonic plague. In other cases a report is sent by letter.

(c) The reports on the progress of the epidemic and the measures taken to prevent its spread under Article 4 of the Convention will be sent in the same conditions as Para. (b).

(d) Weekly telegrams of cases and deaths will be sent weekly by the associated countries to the Regional Bureau.

(e) Weekly Bulletin of infectious diseases to be sent weekly by post.

(f) The reports on the examination of rats and fleas in the ports will be sent monthly to the Regional Bureau according to a model drawn up by the Regional Bureau.

#### Cholera:

(a) As regards cholera, the appearance of suspected cases should be notified for the information of other countries only, it being understood that no restrictions can be taken until confirmation is received.

(b) As regards first cases the same procedure will be adopted as under Plague. As regards the detailed information - in view of the importance of cholera - the report will be transmitted always by telegram.

(c) When cholera appears in a country, the spreading of the disease to an important town will be notified by telegram, as well as the appearance of the disease in a newly infected rural locality, not directly contiguous to a rural locality previously infected.

(d) The reports on the progress of cholera must be as complete as possible and sent by letter. A weekly telegram of cases and deaths must be sent on the same lines as under Plague.

#### Typhus and smallpox:

(a) In view of the difficulty of determining what constitutes an epidemic of typhus or smallpox, the decision is left to the appreciation of the infected country.

(b) The progress of the epidemic of smallpox and typhus will be notified in the weekly telegram of cases and deaths and given separately as regards ports, large cities and rural centres.

Measures prescribed ( Article 16 of the Convention):

The notification of the measures taken or their withdrawal will be transmitted by the associated countries to the Regional Bureau by wire.

Pilgrimage:

(a) The associated countries will notify the Regional Bureau of the departure of a pilgrim ship from their country and the Regional Bureau will communicate this information to the associated countries and to the Singapore Bureau.

(b) The Regional Bureau will notify the associated countries of the existence of infectious diseases at Tor among their nationals.

(c) The Regional Bureau will notify the associated countries concerned, by telegram, of the departure from Tor of ships transporting their nationals.

Code: The AA Code was adopted for the exchange of epidemiological information.

Broadcast: The Regional Bureau will make the necessary arrangements for a weekly broadcast including all the epidemiological information received during the week.

Week: The International week adopted by Singapore Bureau i.e. including the period from Saturday midnight to Saturday midnight was adopted by the Conference.

Obligations of the Alexandria Regional Bureau:

I. (a) Telegraphic notification to the International Health Office and the Regional Bureaux and the associated countries of information received under Article 1 and 6 (3°) of the Convention from the associated countries.

(b) Transmit to the participating countries all information received from the Office International d'Hygiène publique and the Regional Bureaux, either by letter or by telegram when the Regional Bureau of Alexandria considers that the information is urgent.

II. (a) Transmit to the participating countries, the International Health Office and the Regional Bureaux the information received from participating countries under Article 2 of the Convention.

(b) Transmit to the participating countries, the information received under Article 2 of the Convention from the Office International d'Hygiène publique and the Regional Bureaux.

These notifications will be made either by letter or by telegram according to the urgency of the communication and



considering the geographical position of the infected country and the country receiving this notification.

III. Transmission of the information received under Article 4 of the Convention.

IV. Transmission by post to the associated countries, the International Health Office and the Regional Bureaux of the weekly reports on the examination of rats under Article 6 of the Convention.

V. Transmission by telegram to the International Health Office and the Regional Bureaux, and by letter or telegram to the associated countries concerned, of the telegraphic reports received from the associated countries regarding the cessation of infection under Article 12 of the Convention.

VI. The notifications received under Article 16 of the Convention re the measures prescribed are communicated by telegram to the International Health Office and the Regional Bureaux, and also to the associated countries to which this communication may be of interest. In other cases the information is transmitted by post.

#### Erkewit Conference - April 30 - May 1, 1928

In addition to the question on the agenda of that Conference, similar to the Alexandria Conference, the Erkewit Conference had the object of consulting the countries bordering on the Red Sea as regards the Regulations which the Quarantine Board of Egypt had to prepare in accordance with Article 95 of the International Sanitary Convention of 1926 for the transport of pilgrims in the Red Sea.

A preliminary project was drawn up which was later published by the Quarantine Board of Egypt.

The Erkewit Conference ratified the resolution taken by the Alexandria Conference and decided to charge the Regional Bureau of Alexandria to establish a standard pilgrim booklet for all pilgrims of the participating countries, wherein will be stated the vaccinations carried out and the result of the medical examinations carried out on the way to the Hedjaz.

#### Beirut Conference - January 1929

In January 1929, a conference was held, under the auspices of the Regional Bureau for the Near East, at Beirut, for the establishment of rules to govern the pilgrimage. The conference was attended by: Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Trans-jordan and the Levant States ( Syria and Lebanon ). The decisions taken include:

1. The obligation for each country to notify the Regional Bureau of the approximate number of pilgrim, two months before the pilgrimage.
2. The obligation for each pilgrim to be vaccinated before his departure against smallpox and cholera (two injections) less than six months before the departure. As regards anti-plague inoculation this is optional and may be applied only if epidemiological circumstances would require such a measure.
3. No pilgrim pass can be delivered unless the pilgrim produces a return ticket.
4. The country of origin will be responsible towards the countries of transit for the repatriation and the expenses incurred in these countries by any pilgrim.
5. The transit by land must be made by controlled convoys, and under the special conditions established between neighbouring countries.
6. All Mohammedan travellers with an ordinary passport will - during the pilgrim season - be considered as pilgrims and subjected to the regulations governing pilgrims.
7. The pilgrims will follow one of the approved itineraries on the outward journey as well as on the return journey.

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At the International Sanitary Conference held in Paris in October 1938, it was agreed that a Commission including technical representatives of the affiliated countries, would be constituted and that it would hold its first session in 1939, and that at each session it would fix the date of the next session.

Due to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 the new organization was not established.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in proposing to you that this Regional Committee nominate Dr. Aly Tewfik Shousha, Pasha, for the position of Director of the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office.

It seems almost superfluous to remind you of Shousha Pasha qualifications for this office but it is said to be wise to have things "On the record" so I will try to do so.

His qualities and his experience in my opinion, and I am sure, in yours also, make him an ideal choice for this important office.

Indeed the two highly responsible offices he at present holds will recommend him to your most favourable attention. He is Under Secretary of State for Public Health for the Kingdom of Egypt and we all know with what energy, honour and foresight he has graced this onerous post. He is also Chairman of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization. As a member of that board I can testify to the wisdom and efficiency of this Chairmanship and, I may say, to the pace at which he has kept his fellow-members working.

I need say little more, Shousha Pasha has a distinguished record in the Public Health of his own country, in International Health Affairs, and with the World Health Organization. We all know him personally and we know how deeply and genuinely he believes in a world approach to health.

Therefore I have pleasure in proposing the nomination of