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World Federation of Doctors Who Respect Human Life

An organizational meeting of the United States Section of the World Federation of Doctors Who Respect Human Life was held in Chicago on October 18, 1974. The sixty physicians present from around the country formed the Interim Board of Directors of the new medical association.

The WFDWRHL was founded in May, 1974, at an International Congress convoked by the Netherlands Physicians' Association. American representatives attending that meeting included Dr. Thomas Hilgers of St. Louis, Dr. John Willke of Cincinnati, and Dr. Herbert Ratner of Oak Park, Illinois.

The newly formed World Federation adheres to the 1948 *Declaration of Geneva* of the World Medical Association which holds that physicians must "maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of fertilization until natural death." It also adheres to the United Nations *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* which states that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth." The Federation supports the *Declaration of Doctors of North America*, which holds

that "physicians should have the utmost respect for human life, regardless of age, illness, disability, or degree of dependence," and that "the deliberate killing of human beings, born or unborn, to solve psychologic, social, economic or eugenic problems is directly contrary to the role of the doctor."

Commenting on the Netherlands meeting, Dr. Ratner said, "It was a moving experience to be hosted by Dutch physicians who lost 100 of their colleagues in concentration camps during World War II following the Nazi invasion because they refused to capitulate to Nazi demands to mistreat Jewish and other unwanted persons.

"Given the current pressures to disclaim the *Hippocratic Oath*, to disregard the *Geneva Declaration*, to make the United Nations *Declaration of the Rights of Children* inoperative," said Dr. Ratner, "it is imperative for the medical profession to rally before it ends up completely schizophrenic, a killing as well as a healing profession, and nothing more than an instrument of state policy. We'd better make certain who won World War II."

The following interim officers of the United States Section of

the World Federation were elected: President, Dr. Eugene F. Diamond, Chicago; Vice-Presidents, Drs. Willke and Hilgers; and Secretary-Treasurer, Dr. Ratner. An Interim Executive Board was selected to proceed with the organization of the body.

More than 800 North American physicians have signed the *Declaration of Doctors of North America*, and more than 5,000 have made advance commitments to the new organization. Dr. Ratner predicted rapid growth of the United States Section to an active membership of 20,000 or more.

At the time of the October meeting in Chicago the World Federation had already grown to represent medical organizations in 18 countries on six continents, with a membership of over 60,000 physicians.

Featured speaker at the U.S. meeting was Dr. Leo Alexander, a Boston psychiatrist who was an expert witness at the Nuremberg trials. Dr. Alexander documented the degeneration of the German medical profession during the 1920's and 1930's pointing out that it antedated Hitler in its advocacy of killing for "social" reasons. The first step toward contempt for human life, said Dr. Alexander, is the idea "that we are physicians to the commonwealth rather than the individual patient." Once that notion is accepted, he said, the medical profession becomes a tool of the State.

Membership in the U.S. Section of the World Federation includes

prominent physicians from within and without the Right to Life Movement. The following names are only a small indication of the caliber of medical achievement which the new organization represents: Dr. Joseph Kerwin of Houston, America's first physician-astronaut; Dr. Paul Cornely of Washington, recent president of the American Public Health Association; Dr. Jasper F. Williams, President of the National Medical Association; Dr. Mildred Jefferson of Boston, officer of the Americans United for Life and the National Right To Life Committee; Dr. Matthew Bulfin of Fort Lauderdale, President of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists; Dr. Vincent Collins of Winnetka, Illinois, Chief of Anaesthesiology, Cook County Hospital; Dr. Robert Mendelsohn of Evanston, formerly chief of Medical Head-Start for the American Academy of Pediatrics; Dr. Sean O'Reilly, chief of Neurology at George Washington School of Medicine; and Drs. Gino Papola of Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, Richard Applebaum of Miami, Douglas M. Harper of San Jose, California, Fred Mecklenburg of Minneapolis and Wallace W. McWhirter of Tucson.

The *Declaration of Doctors of North America* serves as the statement of purpose of the United States Section of the World Federation of Doctors Who Respect Human Life:

"From the moment of fertilization, that is from the earliest

moment of biologic existence, the developing human being is alive, and entirely distinct from the mother who provides nourishment and protection.

"From fertilization to old age, it is the same living human being who grows, develops, matures and eventually dies. This particular human being with his or her characteristics is unique and therefore irreplaceable.

"Just as medicine is at the service of life when it is failing, so, too, it should serve life from its beginning. It should have absolute respect for human life regardless of age, illness, disability or degree of dependence.

"When confronted with trag-

ic situations, it is the duty of the doctor to do everything possible to help both the mother and her child. The deliberate killing of an unborn human to solve psychological, social, economic or eugenic problems is directly contrary to the role of the doctor."

The following membership fees were established at the organizational meeting: Regular \$10.00 (including a periodic newsletter) and Contributing, Supporting and Sustaining \$25.00 to \$100.00 or more. Physicians who wish to become charter members of the World Federation may forward membership dues to the WFDWRHL, Box 508, Oak Park, IL 60303.

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