History

The history of *The International Pharmacopoeia* (Ph.Int.) dates back to 1874 when the need to standardize terminology and to specify dosages and composition of drugs led to attempts to produce an international pharmacopoeial compendium. The first conference, called by the Belgian Government and held in Brussels in 1902, resulted in the Agreement for the Unification of the Formulae of Potent Drugs, which was ratified in 1906 by 19 countries. The outcome considerably influenced the subsequent publication of national pharmacopoeias.

A second agreement, the Brussels Agreement, was drawn up in 1925 and ratified in 1929. This 41-article agreement stipulated that the League of Nations would be responsible for the administrative work to produce a unified pharmacopoeia, and a permanent secretariat of an international organization would coordinate the work of national pharmacopoeial commissions. General principles for the preparation of galenicals, maximal doses, nomenclature and biological testing of arsenobenzones were included in the articles of this agreement, as was a table of dosage strengths and descriptions for 77 drug substances and preparations.

In response to repeated calls from pharmaceutical experts in various countries that the Brussels Agreement be revised and extended to cover an international pharmacopoeia, the Health Organization of the League of Nations set up a Technical Commission of Pharmacopoeial Experts in 1937. This first committee comprised seven experts from Belgium, Denmark, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (Chairman) and the United States of America.

In 1947 the Interim Commission of the World Health Organization (WHO) took over the work on pharmacopoeias previously undertaken by the Health Organization of the League of Nations, and set up an Expert Committee on the Unification of Pharmacopoeias to continue the work of the League's Technical Commission. The aim of the Expert Committee was to produce a draft international agreement for the unification of pharmacopoeias, modifying and extending the existing Agreement for the Unification of the Formulae of Potent Drugs.

In 1948 the First World Health Assembly approved the establishment of the Expert Committee by the Interim Commission. In 1951 this became the Expert Committee on the International Pharmacopoeia; and subsequently, in 1959, the Expert Committee on Specifications for Pharmaceutical Preparations. The panel has always been named the WHO Expert Advisory Panel on the International Pharmacopoeia and Pharmaceutical Preparations.

Article 2 of the WHO Constitution states that one of the functions of the Organization is "to develop, establish and promote international standards with respect to food, biological, pharmaceutical and similar products". *The International Pharmacopoeia* falls clearly into this category. Also in this context the Third World Health Assembly in 1950 adopted a resolution to create the International Nonproprietary Names (INN) Programme in order to identify pharmaceutical substances unambiguously on a worldwide basis and to provide a single nonproprietary name to be used in monographs.