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**OPENING REMARKS BY DR. NILS DAULAIRE, ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

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**52nd Directing Council of PAHO
65th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Dr. Félix Bonilla, for that warm introduction, and for your leadership as President of the Directing Council.

I also want to thank Dr. Carissa Etienne, Director of PAHO for her leadership, and for convening us this week.

And let me acknowledge World Health Organization Director General Margaret Chan, and thank her for her continued commitment to promoting the health and well-being of all people—in all nations.

I'm so pleased to be here today with so many distinguished guests as we celebrate this 52nd Directing Council. I regret that Deputy Secretary Corr was unable to be with us this morning - we have a small matter involving the possible shutdown of the United States government at midnight tonight that he and Secretary Sebelius are dealing with. I know you will understand their absence.

PAHO has a remarkable record of accomplishments. It has turned global attention to the importance of immunizations. It's been instrumental in responding to public health emergencies, including H1N1 and the Haiti earthquake. And it has launched a global movement to address non-communicable diseases.

All of these advances have been made possible by you: ministers of health and other country representatives coming together to discuss and make decisions on key issues that impact the health of all people across the Americas.

The Affordable Care Act and Universal Health Coverage

One goal that is particularly essential to health—and is a shared priority throughout the Americas—is universal health coverage.

Here in the United States, thanks to President Obama's health care law, we're on the cusp of reaching a major milestone in fulfilling that goal. Tomorrow, new health insurance marketplaces will open in every state—putting better coverage options, and thus, better health within reach of millions of Americans. While some politicians are threatening to shut down the U.S. government at midnight tonight to prevent the Affordable Care Act from coming into full force, President Obama has made it clear that access to affordable, quality health care should be the right of every citizen. On that, I know that all of us in this chamber are united.

Of course, each nation has a different approach to health care services, cost-sharing, financing, and organization. In the past, our nations have worked hard to address the challenges that stand in the way of universal health coverage. We have done so respecting the differences in our societies and our economies.

We've come together to promote equitable access to essential health services. We've forged evolving partnerships between public and private stakeholders at the local, national, regional levels.

And on behalf of Secretary Sebelius I pledge to you, whatever the noise you hear here in Washington over the course of this week, that the United States will continue working with all of you to reduce health disparities and work to tackle the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health.

Non-Communicable Diseases

Working together as a region to turn common desires into effective solutions has never been more important. Because we have come to recognize that a growing number of the most difficult health challenges we face are not confined within national borders.

These challenges include non-communicable diseases, notably cancer, heart disease, chronic lung disease and diabetes -- all driven by common risk factors that include tobacco use, obesity, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol. We recognize now the importance of dealing with these challenges in arenas that go well beyond the traditional health sector, and that these efforts must engage all the countries of the Western Hemisphere in common action.

Over the years, PAHO has become a leader on this issue.

Later this week, PAHO nations will adopt a Regional Action Plan to address non-communicable diseases. The Plan takes into account the need for wide-ranging solutions that tackle the common risk factors I have mentioned, and their economic drivers. Successful implementation of this Plan will be critical as we do our part to help the global community achieve a twenty-five percent drop in premature mortality due to non-communicable diseases by 2025 to which the World Health Assembly has committed all of us.

International Health Regulations

At the same time, we must continue working together to prevent, detect and respond to infectious diseases.

In a world where these threats can spread faster and more unpredictably than ever before—building international partnerships and sharing information is critical to improving our health security.

There's no question that we've made tremendous progress since SARS and H1N1. But the emergence of MERS and H7N9 should remind us all that much more remains to be done.

That includes the successful implementation and continued maintenance of the International Health Regulations. We look forward to building upon the great work that has already been done and continuing to strive towards full compliance with the IHRs throughout the Americas Region.

The United States will continue to partner with PAHO to close the remaining gaps.

Conclusion

Today, this type of international collaboration is more important than ever—and not just in times of crisis.

It's only by working together that we can reach our full capacity to develop life-saving vaccines and conduct the groundbreaking research that will shape the future of public health. Through our common commitment to Universal Health Coverage, we can better address mental health and the needs of the disabled, and gay, lesbian, transgender and other vulnerable and marginalized people among our citizens.

And PAHO embodies that spirit of cooperative action.

Today, we have more opportunities to work together to improve health than ever before.

And the United States looks forward to working with PAHO, in the spirit of hemispheric solidarity, as we continue to seize those opportunities on behalf of all our peoples. Thank you.