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Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus, a Life Dedicated to Public Health



Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus Credit: PAHO/WHO.

When Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus was in high school, he was not sure whether he wanted to be a medical doctor, but a fateful decision led him to choose medicine and study at the Superior School of Medicine of the National Polytechnic Institute of Mexico. At that time, the Superior School of Medicine attributed great importance to public health and work with communities, since its objective was to train professionals from the interior of the country who would return to provide medical services to their communities. This training sparked Dr. Ruiz's interest in public health. It was then that he decided to switch from cardiology or pediatrics to public health, taking the opportunity to enter the School of Public Health with a specialty in Epidemiology.

During his years of specialty training, Dr. Ruiz worked in the community of Zomeyucan on the outskirts of Mexico City, a community without basic sewer or water services. There he learned a lot about working with the community and about health prevention efforts, including vaccination campaigns against measles and polio.

He planned to focus on epidemiological research after graduating. However, since he received a scholarship from the General Directorate of Epidemiology, he was assigned a position in the surveillance group, where his career took off under the supervision of Dr. Luis

Cabrera Cuello. During his time in the Ministry of Health of Mexico, and for 25 years, Dr. Ruiz held important positions such as Deputy Director of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine in the State of Oaxaca, Head of the Department of Diarrheal Disease Control in the General Directorate of Epidemiology, Director of the Residency Program in Applied Epidemiology, Director of Applied Epidemiology, and Director of Epidemiological Surveillance.

In 2007 he was appointed Chief of the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Over the past 14 years, Dr. Ruiz has led the immunization program and has worked hard together with his team to strengthen programs in the Region of the Americas and to support the other regions of the world. During his time heading this program, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome, neonatal tetanus, and measles have all been eliminated.

His younger brother, Dr. Cuitláhuac Ruiz Matus, also a medical doctor, called Dr. Ruiz's professional career "brilliant." He enthusiastically described the contributions that Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz has made to Mexican epidemiology and public health after so many years of dedication and hard work, which has also had an impact through the training of public health professionals in other countries. The two brothers had the opportunity to work together in Mexico's Ministry of Health on different public health issues before Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz joined PAHO.

Dr. Cuitláhuac Ruiz was noticeably moved when describing the inspiration he gained from the career of his brother, who has served as a guide and example throughout his professional years, stressing that being in the same field as his brother was a learning and motivating experience. "I see him as a mentor, teacher, brother, and friend," Cuitláhuac said emotionally, while congratulating his brother on this remarkable trajectory which has left its mark on the personal and professional lives of many people, including all those involved in this issue of the Immunization Newsletter. ■

Contributors: Maite Vera Antelo and Cuitláhuac Ruiz Matus.

Towards the end of my first term as PAHO Director in 2007, Cuauhtémoc joined as the new head of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI). From day one he said he was honored to continue the legacy built since 1977 by Dr. Ciro de Quadros and then by Dr. Jon Andrus.

Cuauhtémoc maintained a close relationship — based on respect and the exchange of ideas — with "Ciro, the Master," who had joined the Sabin Vaccine Institute. This generated an additional benefit for the Program and for the entire Region. For many years, Cuauhtémoc and Ciro had rich and heated discussions within the World Health Organization's (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on immunization and, when they returned to Washington, the three of us would enjoy discussing the items debated and the agreements reached. Dr. Andrus, who had begun to serve as PAHO's Deputy Director, would also join these conversations.

This was the basis for preparing meeting agendas for the regional Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Vaccine-Preventable Diseases, which strengthened evidence-based policy making and created closer ties with the heads of EPIs and PAHO consultants in the countries.

Helping people feel like part of a larger team is another outstanding skill that Cuauhtémoc displayed, both within PAHO and with the countries and partners. He maintained strong collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), and other partners, which made it possible to mobilize financial and human resources and assign highly qualified technical personnel.

When Cuauhtémoc arrived, PAHO was in the final stage of preparing the 2008–2012 Strategic Plan. He enthusiastically joined in,

What We Have Learned from John Fitzsimmons

During his more than 24-year career at WHO and CDC, John Fitzsimmons left a mark on his team and colleagues with valuable lessons for the Organization and public health in general.

John has been a tireless worker who shared his passion and commitment to a common purpose. His continuous motivation to achieve the best conditions for the countries of the Region rubbed off on those of us who worked with him. John recalls how the draft text of a polio eradication agreement for the Southeast Asia Regional Office (SEARO) was written on a paper napkin.

Tenacity, listening skills, and perseverance were essential qualities for representatives of PAHO and the Revolving Fund when negotiating with strategic partners, including donors and suppliers. John was always willing to share with the team what happened at the various meetings as he searched for possible approaches or solutions. Those who worked closely with him know that John always got up early and never without a cup of coffee.

His ability to build strong relationships with strategic partners and allies has led the countries to also express words of gratitude for the Revolving Fund. The PWRs, consultants, and country office staff in general say that, during the pandemic, John's ability to listen and negotiate was critical. It should be noted that the first vaccines to arrive in Latin America and the Caribbean through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility did so in March 2021 in Colombia, a little more than three months after the United States administered its first dose.

His comprehensive vision is a great lesson we learned from John, one that has been crucial in supporting countries as they respond to the pandemic. Thinking about each step of the process, potential barriers, bottlenecks in the supply chain, and securing critical supply in advance, such as syringes, was key. Finally, we should highlight his ability to promote the team's common goals by making Member States the priority

for each intervention by the Revolving Fund.

The Revolving Fund's strength and comparative advantage are largely due to John's steadfastness in advocating for equitable access to safe, quality vaccines. His tremendous collaboration with the Ministries of Health, showing an understanding of both their needs and the market, was a reflection of his vast experience. The consolidation of regional demand from the perspective of the Revolving Fund principles of quality, transparency, solidarity, equity and Pan-Americanism has allowed countries to access vaccines through their national immunization budgets. These same principles motivate us to continue advocating for Member States.

The Revolving Fund team would like to thank John for all his valuable lessons, for his integrity and leadership, and above all, for his humanity, which today allows us to not just call him our boss, but our friend. ■

Contributed by: *Revolving Fund Team.*



Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus and John Fitzsimmons at the launch of Vaccination Week in the Americas in Jamaica, 2016. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

I had the opportunity to meet and interact with Dr. Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus in the early nineties, when I was invited to head the Department of Public Health of the School of Medicine of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Dr. Ruiz Matus was in charge of the epidemiology residency that was based in the General Directorate of Epidemiology at the Ministry of Health. It was there that I came to appreciate the quality of his work and the respect he enjoyed from students and from the epidemiology staff working in the various states of Mexico where he was known as "the nation's epidemiologist."

Working hand in hand with health workers and the residency students, Dr. Ruiz Matus was able to respond to different outbreaks of infectious diseases that hit Mexico at the end of the twentieth century. One of the best known was the cholera outbreak in the Huasteca area in the northeastern part of the country.

In recent years I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Ruiz Matus due to our common interests in vaccines and immunization and his position at PAHO. As in previous years, Dr. Ruiz Matus' ability to work respectfully with the health personnel of the countries of the Region has allowed both the creation of new immunization programs and improvements in the training of the workers who perform

these activities, who at this critical moment are at the forefront of vaccination efforts to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am sure that the knowledge Dr. Ruiz Matus has generated through of a lifetime of work in epidemiology will guide new professionals in the area, to help solve the many problems that will surely continue to arise. My best wishes to Dr. Ruiz Matus in this new phase of his life. ■

Contributed by: *Alejandro Cravioto*



Members of WHO SAGE, with Alejandro Cravioto, along with members of PAHO's Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus: A Leader for Immunization in the Americas and in Times of COVID-19



PAHO's Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit celebrating the elimination of rubella from the Region of the Americas, 2015. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

It was early 2007 and, after several months without a chief for PAHO's Immunization Unit, we eagerly awaited the arrival of someone who would work with us in the coming years to face all the challenges and celebrate the achievements of the Immunization Program of the Americas. In March of that year, Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus was introduced to us as our new boss. It took some of us some time to learn how to properly pronounce his very Mexican name. But we learned it, and it became a word we used many times a day over the past almost 15 years!

Upon assuming his position as head of PAHO's Immunization Program, Dr. Ruiz brought his valuable experience as an epidemiologist and as a manager, after serving as an advisor to the Undersecretary for Promotion and Prevention and as Director of Epidemiology and Surveillance in the General Directorate of Epidemiology at the Ministry of Health of Mexico. This extensive experience and the skills acquired helped him to lead PAHO's Immunization Unit in order to support the countries of the Region. They not only faced the challenges of maintaining achievements made in the eradication of wild poliovirus, they also achieved the elimination of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome, and most recently, neonatal tetanus.

"I've come to a star program and I don't want to knock the stars out of it," was his first sentence at our kickoff meeting and we believe this has been his motto for all these years. From the outset Cuauhtémoc showed himself to be extremely human, always listening to the individual needs of each of the people who had the privilege of working with him. The door to his office was always open and he was always ready to give us his support. It was enough to say, "Can I speak with you?" and he would stop what he was doing to listen.

Always going beyond the call of duty, his dedication to the program served as an example to all of us who worked with him to give more and ensure the success of the regional program. As the public health policy environment changed over the years, Dr. Ruiz showed leadership by establishing relationships with international actors to provide support to countries. Working with PAHO's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Vaccine-Preventable Diseases was essential so that national programs could benefit from recommendations and technical cooperation to maintain achievements and reach new milestones. When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, the immunization unit, under his leadership, estab-



From left to right: Cristina Pedreira, Alba María Roperero, Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus, Desirée Pastor, meeting to discuss the elimination of measles from the Region of the Americas, 2017. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

lished a plan with other PAHO units to support countries in obtaining vaccines; provide them with cooperation to prepare for the reception, storage, and rollout of vaccines; and help them to improve knowledge and practices related to the new technologies and platforms used in some vaccines that require new ultra-low temperature equipment.

One of his personal qualities that contributed a lot to the growth of the team was his calm way of tackling problems. This made an invaluable contribution to the team's mental health, especially during the program's big and frequent challenging moments. One piece of advice we will always remember is what he told us when there were personal frictions, "Look at who it is coming from."

Family life is very important to him and he often shared those experiences and celebrations with us, such as photos of Mexican parties he attended with his family, his daughters' weddings, and then the enormous desire to have grandchildren. Cuauhtémoc's two daughters finally helped make that dream come true for him and his wife, Veronica. He also livened up our meetings with funny stories from Mexico. Cuauhtémoc always said his country was the best in the Americas, which made us laugh because each of us also considers our respective country to be the best in the Americas.

We wish him every success in the next stage of his life, and hope he fully enjoys his family and grandchildren. We will miss him, but we know that wherever he is, he will always be contributing to public health in the Region! ■

Contributed by: Ana Elena Chévez, Lucia Oliveira, Desirée Pastor, Gloria Rey, Nora Lucía Rodríguez, Alba María Roperero, Jennifer Sanwogou, Martha Velandia.



PAHO's Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit, 2012. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

I have been fortunate to know Cuahtémoc

for many years, since we entered the Applied Epidemiology Program at the General Directorate of Epidemiology in Mexico in the 1980s. From the beginning he stood out for his sharp intellect, leadership capacity, and people skills. This led him to successfully take over coordination of the Residency in Epidemiology when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) handed it over. After that, he held high-level positions within the General Directorate of Epidemiology, where he stood out for his superior technical and professional skills, making significant contributions to national public health.

Years later, fate brought us together again when he was appointed Chief of PAHO's Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit. I had the opportunity to work directly with him as PAHO's immunization focal point in Paraguay.

We have many things to admire about Cuahtémoc from the managerial, technical, and professional point of view. But I think that what particularly distinguishes him is how he treats people: his humility, simplicity, and transparency, as well as his ever-present sense of humor, which always gets him a smile (or laugh) in any circumstance—a very valuable feature in work relationships.

Personally, it has been an honor to work with him and to have had his invaluable friendship and unconditional support all these years. Under his direction we have been able to contribute our grain of sand for the prevention and control of vaccine-preventable diseases.

All my thanks and best wishes to Cuahtémoc, his lovely wife, Veronica, and their family on the road ahead. I am sure that somehow he will continue to lead public health actions wherever he is. ■

Contributed by: Raúl Montesano.



Raúl Montesano.

Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus has served

as Chief of PAHO's Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit since March 2007. Leading the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) in the Region of the Americas means overcoming great challenges and seizing opportunities. The EPI in the Region has achieved important goals in the control and elimination of vaccine-preventable diseases.

After gaining valuable experience in public health in his native Mexico, Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus led PAHO cooperation to the countries in the Americas. Under him, the Region has remained polio-free, sustained the elimination of rubella and congenital rubella syndrome, and controlled neonatal tetanus. Mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B has been eliminated in some countries. In view of the resurgence of measles in some countries of the Region, technical cooperation was strengthened to control the disease and maintain measles elimination certification.

Among his responsibilities, Cuahtémoc served as secretary of PAHO's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Vaccine-Preventable Diseases, which has been providing recommendations to immunization programs through 26 meetings with country delegates. The TAG is a forum where immunization experts share experiences, review progress, and provide recommendations. One country colleague said that the TAG meeting report is like a bible for those in the EPI. As senior editor of PAHO's Immunization Newsletter he has ensured regular publication, with 240 issues published so far. Also, thanks to him, Vaccination Week in the Americas is celebrated during the last week of April each year, serving as the inspiration for World Immunization Week.

These initiatives, among many others, have allowed vaccination efforts to continue in the countries of the Region of the Americas, even in 2021, despite the great challenges posed by national COVID-19 vaccination plans.

Reaching all the municipalities and districts or cantons of our countries to apply the complete series of vaccines developed and authorized for emergency use by the WHO or the national regulatory authorities, has turned out to be the best testimony to what has been learned and strengthened in the countries of the Americas through the Expanded Programs on Immunization. ■

Contributed by: Gina Tambini.



Dr. Gina Tambini.



From left to right: Peter Figueroa, Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus, and Roger Glass at the TAG meeting in Varadero, Cuba, 2015. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

Cuahtémoc is someone I got to know closely during our six years working together. He leads the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit, which forms part of PAHO's Department of Family, Health Promotion and Life Course, which I direct. His networking with national and international actors to improve immunizations performance in the Region is extensive, and his management of the Unit has been delightful. The Region achieved high record milestones during his tenure. The coverage of immunization programs suffered worldwide over the past ten years and so did the regional program. This showed us all to learn from experiences to reinvigorate practices and address shortcomings, and we are currently working on this with Member States.

Immunization is a key element for public health and equity worldwide, and the mutual support that health systems and immunizations jointly share are undoubtedly important. Cuahtémoc has been extremely diligent in tying bonds to strengthen primary health care and promoting access and delivery of comprehensive immunizations throughout the life course. His experience showed him the threat of decentralizing the management of immunization programs too much and worked on a balanced approach.

Cuahtémoc is someone pleasant to work with, who is passionate and very committed to his work. He is a great communicator, something that is essential for work in public health. His work guiding and supporting his team during Vaccination Week in the Americas has been remarkable. His examples when explaining something related to immunization are



Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus and Andrés de Francisco. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

clear and sound. He has an ample and in-depth view of the field of immunization. He also has a great sense of humor, which reminds us frequently of the importance of assessing different points of view.

I am sure that even after his retirement he will continue working as a champion promoting immunization. I surely hope so! ■

Contributed by: Andrés de Francisco.

PAHO's Doctor Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus Awarded for Achievements in Health

The H. Commission of the Mexican Society of Public Health has awarded PAHO's own Doctor Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus with the 2014 Medal for Health Excellence as an acknowledgement of his outstanding career in public health and for the indisputable contributions he has made both to the Mexican Society of Public Health and to the field of public health.

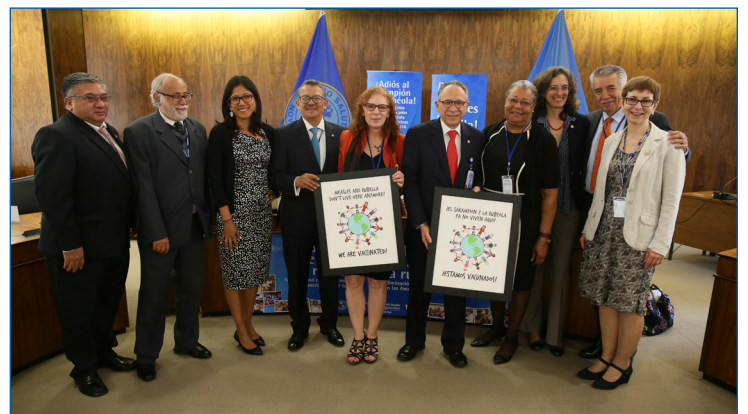
The award was given to Doctor Ruiz Matus on 19 November 2014 during the inauguration ceremony for the 67th Annual Public Health Meeting in Mérida Yucatán, Mexico, his native country. It was here that he worked with the Secretary of Health for 25 years before coming to PAHO and heading the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit in the Department of Family, Health Promotion and Life Course.



Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus accepts the 2014 Medal for Health Excellence in Mexico. Credit: Sociedad Mexicana de Salud Pública.



Celebration of the elimination of rubella in the Region, 2015. Credit: PAHO/WHO.



Celebration of the elimination of measles and rubella in the Region, 2016. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

Cuahtémoc Ruiz has led one of PAHO's most strategic units with a long record of success in the Region. During these years, in addition to many achievements, such as the introduction of several new vaccines and the achievement or maintenance of the elimination of various diseases, new challenges have emerged.

Today, many families and even health professionals do not have enough appreciation for vaccines because they think that the diseases they prevent are gone for good. We believe this has led to the emergence of anti-vaccine groups and vaccine hesitancy, in addition to such challenges such as rapid

urbanization and migration.

Cuahtémoc's leadership and dedication to immunization activities in the Region were essential in allowing PAHO to continue supporting countries to respond appropriately to these challenges and strengthen vaccination and surveillance of vaccine-preventable diseases, surely some of the most valuable interventions we have in public health.

We will miss you, Cuahtémoc. I salute you for all you have given PAHO and wish you all the best for this next stage of life.

All the best to you. ■

Contributed by: Jarbas Barbosa.



Jarbas Barbosa at the TAG meeting in Cartagena, Colombia, 2019. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

CDC Celebrates 15 Years of Collaboration with PAHO's Doctor Cuahtémoc Ruiz

CDC's Global Immunization Division has collaborated with Doctor Cuahtémoc Ruiz as the leader of PAHO's Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit since 2007. Under his leadership, our partnership has thrived, and we have been inspired by his dedication and passion to protect the health and wellbeing of all people living in the Americas.

CDC and PAHO collaborated with countries to achieve and verify the regional elimination of rubella and measles in the Americas – the first and only WHO region to reach this goal. In 2017, maternal and neonatal tetanus was added to the list of diseases that are now eliminated in the Region. Doctor Ruiz supported the introduction of several new vaccines in Haiti (pentavalent, rotavirus, and pneumococcal conjugate vaccines) and the implementation of multiple rounds

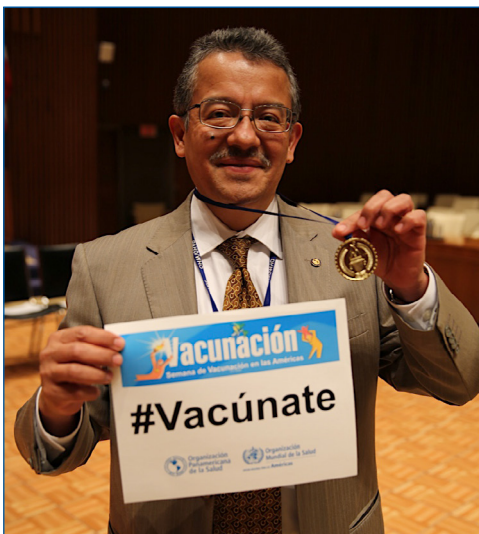
of vaccine campaigns (polio, measles, rubella, diphtheria, and oral cholera vaccine), leading to more lives saved, vaccine-preventable outbreaks averted, and progress toward elimination goals for the Region.

Doctor Ruiz has been a visionary in his support for immunization and surveillance systems, including the Haiti Expanded Program for Immunization (EPI) and establishing the critical surveillance system in Haiti to document the sustained elimination of polio. We have worked in partnership to strengthen immunization systems, including vaccine safety across the Americas, and have developed and implemented the regional ESAVI surveillance guidelines. Doctor Ruiz was instrumental in the collaboration between national EPI programs and laboratories, including his support for successful trainings in several countries

on data triangulation and interpretation for improved decision-making.

These achievements are just a few notable successes among many for which we acknowledge the contributions and drive of the man who steadfastly led and focused his talents for public good. CDC's Global Immunization Division thanks Doctor Ruiz for his dedication, compassion, and friendship during our 15 years of collaboration. His work has led to the prevention of disease, disability, and death – impacting and saving countless lives across the Americas. ■

Contributed by: Will Schluter, on behalf of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



Cuahtémoc Ruiz celebrating Vaccination Week in the Americas, 2016. Credit: PAHO/WHO.



Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus at the launching of Vaccination Week in the Americas in Jamaica, 2016. Credit: PAHO/WHO.



Cuahtémoc Ruiz Matus at the 2019 TAG meeting in Cartagena, Colombia. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

A Tribute to Doctor Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus



Left to right: Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus, Peter Figueroa, and Desirée Pastor. Credit: Peter Figueroa.

I first met Doctor Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus around the time he became Unit Chief of Comprehensive Family Immunization, PAHO, in 2007. He already had a distinguished career in Mexico working in the Ministry of Health as Coordinator of the Subsecretary of Prevention and Health Promotion and prior to that as Director of Epidemiological Surveillance. I recall him in the company of his predecessor Doctor Ciro De Quadros, who became the Chair of PAHO's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in 2008. Since then, we have met and worked together at both TAG and meetings of WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on immunization for over a decade.

I found Cuauhtémoc easy to work with and we got on well. He is highly committed, well informed, and he works hard. He has a team of highly committed and capable staff who work around the clock to support the countries of the Americas and the Caribbean. Given the challenges of health reform, decentralization of immunization programs, political and economic crises, natural disasters, and a series of different epidemics and pandemics, this has not been an easy task.

My experience working with Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus



Ida Berenice Molina.

For the past 29 years I have served as manager of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) of Honduras, and for the past 14 I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz Matus, in his capacity as Chief of the Immunization Unit of the PAHO/WHO Regional Office.

Throughout this time, his leadership has been essential in guiding the Region of

the Americas through the framework of regional immunization plans. This has made it possible to establish regional goals to expedite the introduction of new vaccines to vaccination schedules, achieve the transition from childhood vaccination to family vaccination throughout the life course, address challenges such as vaccine hesitancy that affect the downward trend in EPI vaccine coverage, integrate vaccination into other health interventions, and advance in the control and elimination of vaccine-preventable diseases. All these achievements attest to his leadership at the helm of a technical team supporting the countries of the Region.

As a member and then chair of the PAHO TAG, I found that Cuauhtémoc and his team supported the work of the TAG fully, prepared for our meetings thoroughly, and always considered the TAG recommendations seriously. During his tenure there have been important achievements including the certification of polio elimination in the Americas, the elimination of neonatal tetanus, the introduction of new vaccines, including the birth dose of hepatitis B, the increase in the number of national immunization technical advisory groups (NITAGs), and the introduction of electronic immunization registries (EIRs). The biggest challenges have been large outbreaks of measles and the decline in DTP3 immunization coverage further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, many of our countries have not invested adequately in their vaccination programs, which are among the most cost-effective interventions in health.

At SAGE meetings we sit side by side and our assessments of the different topics are usually aligned. I recall vividly when SAGE discussed the CYD-TDV dengue fever vaccine, and we were not comfortable with the decision taken. We were in the minority when we indicated that we would not be promoting use of this vaccine in the Americas. Life proved that our assessment was correct.

In recent years, Cuauhtémoc had a health problem which he faced with courage, fortitude, and without complaint. Even when he was not 100% fit, he insisted on making his contribution. His commitment to improving the health of the people through immunization was paramount. His contribution to public health has been recognised with several awards, including the Medalla al Mérito Sanitario in 2014 from the Sociedad Mexicana de Salud Pública. I wish to signal my appreciation for his dedication and commitment and thank him for his sterling contribution. I wish him well with his retirement. Knowing him, I believe that he will continue to make an important contribution to immunization and public health following his retirement from PAHO. ■

Contributed by: Peter Figueroa, Chair, PAHO TAG on Immunization.

Without a doubt, Dr. Ruiz leaves a legacy of humility and patience as a tireless defender of the commitment of all immunization health workers in the Region of the Americas, which has left its mark on public health. During his tenure, the elimination of rubella, congenital rubella syndrome, measles, and neonatal tetanus has been certified, contributing to a reduction in infant and general mortality.

The COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination has been one of the biggest challenges the world and the Region have ever had to face. Under the leadership of Dr. Ruiz, it has been possible to provide technical guidance and timely recommendations in support of national decision-making.

His legacy will always be an example for immunization managers in the countries and for new generations of health workers in the Region of the Americas, who work every day to protect their populations through vaccination, overcoming the multiple barriers that exist in each country.

I speak for all the immunization managers in the Region of the Americas in thanking you and wishing you success in this new stage in your life. ■

Contributed by: Ida Berenice Molina.

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PAHO

ROSES cont. from page 1

developing many key components and indicators to facilitate the incorporation of new vaccines, expand vaccination schedules and coverage, and meet the goals of eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases.

I would highlight his determination and personal dedication to the renewal and strengthening of the Revolving Fund for Vaccine Procurement created in 1979. He worked tenaciously and assiduously to incorporate the Fund into the area of Administration and Procurement, keeping it closely linked to the EPI to ensure that the Fund's technical cooperation and programming served a single objective: to keep the Region moving forward as a pioneer in immunization.

The Gavi Alliance, created in 2000, was a necessary and welcome mechanism to ensure the incorporation of new high-cost vaccines (pneumococcus, rotavirus, human papillomavirus). Seven selected countries from the Region of the Americas (Bolivia, Cuba, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Paraguay) were involved. I can remember the long negotiating sessions to ensure that the purchase of new vaccines for those countries

would be consolidated through the Revolving Fund, and thus benefit all the countries of the Region.

Under Cuauhtémoc's leadership, the countries of the Americas met their commitment to eliminate both measles and endemic transmission of congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). As a result, the Region was declared free of CRS and neonatal tetanus, while remaining protected against reintroduction of polio.

I especially want to mention the unparalleled experience of Vaccination Week in the Americas, later expanded to World Immunization Week. I will always remember visiting the most remote communities and the furthest corners of our Region, bringing national and local authorities together at the borders. Every year, we renewed our energy by joyfully celebrating vaccination as an affirmation of life and health, reviving the slogan that "vaccination is an act of love."

Thank you, Cuauhtémoc, for your years of service to PAHO, to the Region, and to our beloved Expanded Program on Immunization. ■

Contributed by: Mirta Roses.



Dr. Mirta Roses



PAHO launches Vaccination Week in the Americas on the Peru-Bolivia border, 2011. Credit: PAHO/WHO.