



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

55th DIRECTING COUNCIL
68th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS
Washington, D.C., USA, 26-30 September 2016

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CLOSING REMARKS BY DR. CARISSA F. ETIENNE
DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU

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**30 September 2016
Washington, D.C.**

**55th Directing Council of PAHO
68th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Honorable President of the 55th Directing Council, Dr. Edna Yolani Batres,
Honorable Ministers and Secretaries of Health of PAHO-WHO Member States,
Deputy Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Asamoah Baah,
Distinguished Delegates,
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations in formal relations with the Pan
American Health Organization,
Representatives of the United Nations and Other Specialized Agencies,
Fellow PAHO and WHO Colleagues,
Honored Guests,
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have now come to the last item on the agenda of the 55th PAHO Directing Council and the 68th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas. I am sure that you would all agree that it has been a long but nevertheless an exhilarating and highly successful week during which we attentively reviewed and discussed more than 40 agenda items; we endorsed 12 resolutions; we participated in 7 very interesting side events and we celebrated some of our key achievements with lots of cake. You have worked really hard this week! At the beginning of the meeting I gave an account of my stewardship and that of the Bureau during the annual report of the Director in which I detailed our achievements and challenges over the past year.

Once again, I firmly believe that the successful outcomes of this 2016 Council Meeting are a consequence of that Pan American solidarity that was demonstrated at its very best as we collectively agreed to collaborate on the resolution of those significant and common health challenges that we all face.

Through our various strategies and plans of action we committed ourselves to building resilient health systems underpinned by sustainable financing; to increasing equitable access to high-cost medicines and other much needed health technologies; to responding effectively to the Zika virus epidemic and its adverse sequelae; to reducing the burden and impact of the chronic non-communicable diseases and their associated

risk factors; to strengthening the IHR core capacities and preparedness for new and re-emerging infectious diseases; to strengthening surveillance, clinical management, laboratory diagnosis and vector management for the arthropod-borne viral diseases. We re-emphasized our collective determination to press ahead with the continued elimination of a number of neglected infectious diseases as well as malaria, HIV and syphilis transmitted from mother-to-child.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in addition to the crucial work that you have undertaken over these past days, I believe that this week would be recorded in the annals of public health as historic, as our Region was declared free of indigenous measles transmission on the twenty seventh day of September 2016, some 22 years after PAHO Member States had pledged their commitment to achieving this goal. In this monumental achievement we must recognize the unwavering political will and financial contributions of the governments, partners and donors together with the dedicated and steadfast work of national health staff in all of our countries and territories in bringing the benefits of vaccination to all peoples in the Americas.

I wish to emphasize that while we have been highly successful with the elimination of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels and become complacent when these viruses continue to circulate in other regions of the world. We must continue to be vigilant on this front.

Looking ahead, we must prepare our governments and peoples to effectively respond both to the rapid ageing of our populations as well as to the massive population expansion that is anticipated over the next few decades. We must work together with each other and across all of government and with all sectors of society in order to lay a strong foundation for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

During this week, WHO and PAHO Member States in the Americas were also fortunate to have been introduced to three of the prospective candidates for the post of Director General of WHO. As a Secretariat we do hope that as the new Director General of WHO strives to strengthen global capacity and response in health, he or she would build on the successes, achievements and best practices that have emerged from our Region –recognizing the heterogeneity and differences between the WHO regions, even as we wholeheartedly deliver our technical cooperation as ONE WHO. For our part we will continue to actively discharge our core functions of providing technical support and building institutional capacity; articulating policy options; monitoring the health situation and trends and providing visionary leadership on health to our Member States.

In closing, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to you our Member States for the continued prudent guidance and judicious advice that was delivered during this meeting and in a spirit of mutual cooperation and respect. I would like to

convey my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to each and every member of staff for their unstinting and dedicated service to the Organization on a daily basis and for their exhaustive preparatory work for this meeting without which its success could not have been guaranteed.

I wish all attendees here today a very safe return journey to your respective homes and countries. Let us continue to strive to improve the health and wellbeing of all peoples in the Region of the Americas regardless of social class, ethnic background, religious persuasion or gender.

Thank you all very much.
