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**OPENING REMARKS BY MR. JOSÉ MIGUEL INSULZA, SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

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

Dr. Carissa Etienne, Director of the Pan American Health Organization
Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization
Distinguished ministers and members of the Directing Council
of the Pan American Health Organization

I would like to begin by very sincerely thanking Dr. Etienne for her invitation to join you at this meeting of the 52nd Directing Council, and by extending my warmest greetings to all of you.

For almost a century, the OAS and PAHO have worked hand-in-hand to improve the living conditions of the citizens of the Americas.

The closely linked social factors that are the primary determinants of health, poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, and inequality undermine the basis of legitimacy of democratic governments and simultaneously affect the ability of states to design effective public health policies. Democracy, development, and health are closely interrelated. That's where the importance of cooperation between our organizations lies, and that of the Inter-American System as a whole.

There are several reasons why, according to PAHO figures, the Region today is on track to reach most of the health targets set forth in the Millennium Development Goals. Without a doubt, one reason that stands out is the joint, coordinated activity of national, regional, and international organizations.

I want to recognize one of these collaboration initiatives between our organizations. Our recent regional consultation with civil society on the social determinants of health made it possible for us to bring together more than 3,000 organizations that contributed input on such topics as the impact of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental determinants of health.

The results of this effort are significant for PAHO as well as for the Inter-American System of Human Rights in terms of the process of examining the right to health within the framework of the Protocol of San Salvador.

We have worked together to improve treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS, an issue to which we are committed. In addition, we are committed to the Resolution of the last declaration of our Organization that reiterates our desire to work with PAHO to declare the year 2015 as the “Inter-American Year to Promote the Human Rights of People Vulnerable to, Living with, or Affected by HIV/AIDS.”

The major advances by our organizations in taking advantage of the power of information technology and communications have been key to improving literacy levels and the exchange of knowledge, good practices, and experiences with regard to health. We are working together in this area.

I want to mention that from April to June of this year we conducted the first virtual course on the right to health. This initiative has been key to recognizing challenges and common solutions not only with regard to health policies, but also in the legislative processes involved with those policies. Through the Network for Consumer Safety and Health we coordinate the efforts of consumer and health officials to guarantee that the goods and services in the market do not pose risks to the lives and health of the citizens of our hemisphere.

I also believe it is important to note the role of both institutions in Haiti. This last week, the group Friends of Haiti held a meeting within the framework of the meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. A central topic of the meeting was the cholera epidemic, which is not just a health emergency; it also speaks to the need to strengthen public institutions in Haiti. I had the honor to present this topic at the Friends of Haiti meeting, and especially to praise the excellent work being undertaken by the Pan American Health Organization in this regard.

Finally, I want to point out and acknowledge the collaboration of PAHO in the preparation of the Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas. The involvement of PAHO has been and will continue to be critical, given that the major conclusion of the report—a conclusion that has been widely accepted by all our Member States—is that the drug problem is mainly a public health problem, and that it is this approach which will enable us to move beyond the repressive vision that has prevailed to date.

Drug trafficking certainly represents one of the greatest threats to democracy and stability in the hemisphere. But although there has been progress in halting production and trafficking in recent years, much more needs to be done to reduce consumption, which is precisely what is signified by a public health approach. When we received the mandate to analyze the results of current policies with regard to the drug problem, and to prepare our Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas to present to

the Presidents of the Americas, we counted on the collaboration of the Pan American Health Organization to study the issue with a comprehensive and public health focus.

It is essential that the OAS and PAHO support each other and combine their capacities to manage and feed the debate that has been generated as a result of the publication of the Report and the Resolution of our General Assembly held in Antigua, Guatemala. For that reason, we assign great importance to the breakfast meeting that we will have in order to hear the opinions of the Ministers on this topic and on how we can increase our cooperation. Indispensable to this dialogue is the commitment and active participation by you, the Ministers of Health of the Region, in launching initiatives within your own countries.

We have much progress and many achievements to celebrate, but we also still have clearly identified areas that need work, such as universal access to quality health services. I take advantage of this opportunity to point out that we understand that this is the great problem currently being debated in this country, and in this regard we offer all of our solidarity and recognition of the effort of President Obama to extend health care to all the citizens of his country.

I would again like to thank Dr. Carissa Etienne, who in less than a year as the Director of PAHO has already demonstrated impressive qualities both in terms of technical know-how and leadership. I also thank her for working to ensure that the Pan American Health Organization continues to have a significant impact on the promotion of policies for the social, economic, and political development of our Region.

Thank you very much.