



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE  
Americas

## 56th DIRECTING COUNCIL

**70th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS**

*Washington, D.C., USA, 23-27 September 2018*

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**CLOSING REMARKS BY DR. CARISSA F. ETIENNE  
DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU  
AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR THE AMERICAS OF THE  
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

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**27 September 2018  
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**56th Directing Council of PAHO  
70th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

President of the 56th Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization,  
Honorable Dr. Duane Sands, Minister of Health of the Commonwealth of  
the Bahamas,

Other Distinguished Members of the Head Table,  
Honorable Ministers and Secretaries of Health of PAHO/WHO Member States,  
Distinguished Member State Delegates,  
Eminent Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Representatives of Nongovernmental Organizations in Official 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:

A very Good Morning to you all.

It is with a wonderful sense of fulfillment that I am standing with you this morning to bring to a close this Fifty Sixth Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization. During these past five days, we have successfully navigated through 54 agenda items; participated in 6 side events; reviewed 11 progress reports; and approved 9 resolutions.

We also participated in an inspiring ceremony, in which we awarded PAHO's highest distinction—that of Public Health Hero of the Americas—to His Excellency Dr. Tabaré Ramón Vázquez Rosas, President of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay. His exemplary work, indefatigable persistence and unstinting dedication in the fight to reduce the colossal burden and impact of the non-communicable diseases and to protect the health of his people, should have stimulated our motivation to never surrender in this public health fight.

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We have now come to the end of a highly productive and engaging week and on behalf of the entire Pan American Sanitary Bureau and on my own behalf, I wish to extend my sincerest thanks and heartfelt appreciation to you all for your individual and collective contributions to delivering on this week's extensive tasks. When you, our Member States, provide critical analyses of proposed policies, strategies and plans of action and evidence-based guidance and direction to the Bureau with the level of dedication and thoroughness that you displayed this week, you are ensuring both the quality and the relevance of PAHO's technical cooperation programs both now and well into the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen... I would like to take a few moments to briefly recapture a few highlights of this week's deliberations.

With your approval of the plan of action for cervical cancer—a disease, from which more than 35,000 women in our region die every year—we have committed to collaborating with you to reorganize country programs and to accelerate efforts to ensure universal access to sexual health and STI prevention services including HPV vaccines, effective screening, treatment, and palliative care.

The new plan of action on human resources for universal health provides valuable guidance in emphasizing the crucial importance of bringing together all relevant sectors when developing policies and plans for building the human resources required for universal health systems. More strategic collaboration with the education and labor sectors under the leadership of the health sector will be highly preferable than continuing to work in silos if we are to ensure adequate human resources for health.

Your support for the plan of action on entomology and vector control, demonstrates a clear recognition of the ongoing importance of public health action in this area to reduce the burden and impact of vector-borne diseases. Diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, Zika, chikungunya and dengue, which persist or have re-emerged in countries of the Americas, generate major negative impacts on human health and national economies, including the tourism sector, and often disproportionately affect populations living in conditions of vulnerability.

We have also recommitted ourselves to advancing the health of women, children and adolescents utilizing a life course approach; working to dismantle cultural and gender barriers to access; ensuring integrated health care and services; and addressing the social determinants of health as well as the specific needs and challenges of particular groups.

Sir Michael Marmot in his summary of the report of the Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities convincingly reminded us of the fundamental importance of social determinants—where one is born, grows, lives, works and ages—to ill health. He

emphasized that health and health equity represented important markers of societal progress owing to the very close linkages between features of society and health. The Commission has provided 12 important recommendations for addressing them as we work towards universal health in our region.

You carefully reviewed progress and final reports on a number of strategies and plans of action that are either still under implementation or have concluded. We all agree that even while we continue to build on our collective successes, there is yet much work to be undertaken in addressing those persistent challenges such as maternal mortality, child health, road safety, climate change and health, the health of LGBT persons, and others.

We are as resolved and committed as you are to continuing our joint efforts to strengthen national and regional preparedness and response for disease outbreaks and health emergencies within the framework of the International Health Regulations, and all in a consolidated effort to enhance regional and global health security. The importance of this work cannot be overstated as we live in an increasingly super-connected world.

I am also very pleased to learn of your expectations and determination to continue to work with us to advance progress in such important areas as research for health and eHealth. Additionally, it is valuable to identify new opportunities for sharing knowledge of lessons learned and best practices based on country experiences, through communities of practice and new South-South partnerships within PAHO's framework of Cooperation among Countries for Health Development, CCHD.

Regarding the development of the next PAHO Strategic Plan 2020-2025, your support and involvement have already exceeded our expectations, as 21 Member States are actively participating in the current development process. We look forward to your continuing active engagement in this process.

In closing and on behalf of us all, I wish to convey our special thanks and deep appreciation to our President, Minister Duane Sands of The Bahamas, for his steady hand and his good-natured humor as he efficiently presided over this 56th Directing Council ensuring that we remained on course to complete the week's agenda with respect, civility and sensitivity. I would also like to express our sincerest thanks to the President of the Executive Committee as well as to Rapporteurs.

I also wish to thank our Deputy Director, Dr. Isabella Danel, for her dedicated work as Secretary to the Directing Council and all of our staff including those of the Governing Bodies Office for their tireless efforts and sterling contributions both during this week's meeting and in the many weeks preceding. I also extend a hearty thank-you to our talented interpreters, without whom we would be unable to do conduct our work in a seamless manner.

Today as we leave this House of Health for the Americas and each other, I would respectfully ask that we recommit ourselves to the Pan American values of equity, excellence, solidarity, respect and integrity. This is vital as we recall the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration of Health for All and work both individually and collectively, and nationally and regionally to ensure that no one is left behind and that each individual is facilitated with the means and access to attain the highest possible standards of health.

Once again, I congratulate you all for a job well done. Please do have a safe return journey to your respective homes.

I thank you.

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