



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



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

57th DIRECTING COUNCIL

71st SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

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**OPENING REMARKS BY THE OUTGOING PRESIDENT
OF THE PAHO DIRECTING COUNCIL, HON. DR. DUANE SANDS
MINISTER OF HEALTH OF BAHAMAS**

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**30 September 2019
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**57th Directing Council of PAHO
71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Director General of WHO,
PAHO Director, Dr. Carissa Etienne,
Delegates

Today I greet you with a full heart and a profound sense of gratitude for the support and tangible assistance you have given to The Bahamas. Thank you for what you have done to assist us with the restoration and rebuilding in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian that devastated the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama, but which indirectly affected all other islands in the chain of islands.

It has been a great honor and privilege for me and my country to have served as your president of the Sanitary conference for the past year.

I wish to give special recognition to all the PAHO employees - those at our headquarters, those in the country offices and those who work in the field for their great teamwork and the sharing of technical knowledge and expertise. Your work has resulted in saving countless lives, preventing the spread of illnesses and death and promoting healthy living for individuals, populations, communities and countries without fear or favor. We commend the work of the auditors and the legal team that have given confidence to all donors that PAHO is transparent and accountable for funds received.

We salute the leadership of PAHO... true public health warriors who were not distracted by changing political landscapes, economic uncertainties or external shocks whether they were man-made or the result of natural occurrences.

I admit...In the current era, such a distinction may seem arbitrary or ambiguous.

This organization has achieved much and has led the world with eradication, prevention and control of diseases. It has been a major promoter of healthy lifestyles while giving deliberate attention to cultural diversity, ethnic sensitivity and the protection of vulnerable populations.

The basis of PAHO's strength might be summarized that one country with all the resources in the world cannot achieve what 39 countries can achieve together"

PANAMERICANISM OR PANAMERICAN SOLIDARITY is a principle that is still... perhaps more... relevant now. We must again commit to lend a helping hand to each other and not leave anyone behind.

During this year I witnessed the commitment of quality healthcare service delivery to various ethnic and culturally diverse groups in our area. I was moved to see that this was particularly directed at vulnerable communities and populations who are often marginalized, sometimes stigmatized but generally poor and underserved.

This year's Council's agenda items are relevant and important to the changing landscape that confronts us. We must prepare for all challenges; some are known, and some are unknown. Our mission is to be prepared to respond to all health threats - big or small, in order to protect all people, wherever they live, work or travel simply as a response to their intrinsic human worth - regardless of the peculiar or defining realities of their human condition or circumstances of their birth.

As the 21st century unfolds, we find ourselves confronting the massive, unprecedented challenges of NCD's, recurrence of vaccine preventable illnesses that we imagined were of historic interest only, and the (MLK) "fierce urgency of now" to find the sustainable path to universal health care that all of our people deserve.

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there "is" such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.

Martin Luther King Jr.

If you had any doubt before... the recent monster storms with ordinary names like Matthew, Irma and Dorian... names now sullied because they are associated with anguish and grief...have taught us that we must now do all that we can to mitigate the global effects of warming our planet while we have the time to do so.

We must work to disincentivize behaviors that add to increasing carbon footprints and the triple threat of "turbocharged" winds, massive rainfall and catastrophic sea surges that the people who reside in Small Island Developing States must now accept as a new normal.

At the same time, let us create workable energy and built environment solutions for sustainable and resilient communities.

Distinguished Delegates

In 72 agonizing hours Hurricane Dorian dismantled ...deconstructed...destroyed many of the gains we had made in advancing the sustainable development goals in two of the northernmost islands of the Bahamas. The images alone do not do justice to the magnitude of the impact on the persons directly affected.

I stand here today ...humbled to have been given a voice to tell their collective story.

I appeal to this conference to be strong advocates for those with least are asked to give up the most. The marginalized poor who work hard to provide for their families and who are overcome by the powerful who OFTEN serve their own interests This is in keeping with the Sustainable development goal (2)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must see opportunity with every adverse outcome.

The gospel tells us that Adversity builds character”.

Like my fellow delegates who have endured severe climatic events, In the Bahamas, we resolutely accept the challenge to restore and rebuild. Rebuild we must...and Rebuild we shall!

To those delegates who have not yet had such an impact, and I pray that you do not... our recent experiences may be yours if we- collectively and resolutely - do not address Climate change.

We are in this together. Let us work together to guarantee a brighter future for our children and those yet unborn.

I thank you for the privilege of being able to serve and add my congratulations and best wishes to the incoming president.
