



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
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62nd SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

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**OPENING REMARKS OF DR. ESPERANZA MARTÍNEZ
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF PARAGUAY, AS PRESIDENT OF THE
49th DIRECTING COUNCIL**

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**50th DIRECTING COUNCIL OF PAHO
Washington, D.C., 27 September 2010**

Honorable President
Honorable Ministers of Health
Distinguished Delegates
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Dr. Mirta Roses, Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning.

As President of 49th Directing Council of PAHO and the 61st Session of the Regional Committee of the World Health Organization, it is a great pleasure to greet you all at this opening session of the Directing Council of PAHO and Regional Committee of WHO.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to make some observations about the most significant public health events of the past year in the Region and to comment on the most important items on the agenda of the 50th Directing Council of PAHO that we are commencing.

I will briefly mention the most important events of the year, as well as the efforts made in the Region.

This year, the most important events were without a doubt the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, where the international community, especially in this Region, has demonstrated its solidarity, mobilizing a vast amount of human, technical, and financial resources for the affected countries through various types of cooperation. The damage to health in terms of death, sickness, and injury and the consequent disability devastated thousands of families. The destructive force of these natural phenomena did not spare health facilities and highlighted our vulnerabilities and our responsibility to prepare disaster response and mitigation plans.

The dengue epidemic has widely affected Central America and the Southern Cone, despite the progress made in epidemiological

surveillance and vector control. Dengue is not only one of the health problems with the greatest political, social, and economic impact in our countries, but it seems that the figures for 2010 will far surpass those of all previous epidemics. The great challenge is still to influence social and environmental determinants in order to promote healthier environments.

The human influenza A (H1N1) pandemic has taught us lessons, among them the value of a rapid response by the countries, the product of timely preparation and focused above all on strengthening epidemiological surveillance, control systems, and in this most recent period, the availability of vaccines, manufactured in record time. All of this has helped reduce the impact on public health, as we have seen in previous pandemics. I would also like to emphasize the key role of PAHO, noting first its efforts to ensure that all the countries have access to safe biologicals at affordable prices, including the Revolving Fund of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) in the strategies used to bridge the gaps in access that once existed among the countries.

I would also like to point out the progress and maturation of the subregional integration initiatives--MERCOSUR, UNASUR, the Andean Region, and the Central American Region--where regional agendas are taking shape and there are still many challenges ahead. In UNASUR we have recently agreed on Strategic Planning in Health, drafting a 5-year Plan 2010-2015 with very clear goals.

We must view regional integration as an opportunity to develop a political community in public health with ethical, democratic values of inclusion and social participation that will help reduce inequities and social injustice--one in which consensus and political and technical decision-making should prevail to achieve the expected results.

Reviewing the work agenda that we will share this week, several important items will be addressed. I would like to comment briefly on some of them.

In light of their social inequity and poverty indicators, the countries of the Region are making health and human rights the cornerstone of health policies and processes for developing their national health systems.

Renewal of the primary health care strategy has enabled the countries of the Region to forge new paths toward the reform and strengthening of their health systems--hence, the key importance of

progress in developing health worker competencies for primary health care, based on knowledge and scientific evidence.

The Strategy and Plan of Action for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition today is part of global vision grounded in the social determinants that facilitates coordinated complementary intersectoral interventions with concrete action at the local level. International cooperation has adopted this strategic vision with the creation of the Pan American Alliance for Nutrition and Development, which promotes and implements coordinated strategies with cooperation agencies

Concerning Health, Human Security, and Well-being, we must focus on decreasing the vulnerability of populations to acute health threats. One of the main tools in this regard is the International Health Regulations; national governments, moreover, need to strengthen their political and legal systems to ensure the equitable integration of all people--in particular, through the adoption of a gender equity approach--thereby guaranteeing a legal identity in which the right to human security, especially equity in health, is respected.

Another challenge that we will be addressing in this session is Urbanism and Healthy Living. In 2007, it was estimated that over half the world's population was living in cities. According to WHO, in 2030, that figure will be 60% and in 2050, 70%. Urban health is linked, among other things, to urban planning, urban transportation, recycling, physical activity and healthy lifestyles, the reduction of violence, and environmental sanitation--factors that affect the health of individuals.

Finally, I would like to highlight PAHO's role and the work that it is doing to address the principal health problems in our Region--its governance and policy orientation role, which enables us to make joint progress in the construction of our health systems, facilitating and supporting local, national and regional initiatives and making a commitment to sharing experiences, developing knowledge, fostering scientific and technological innovation, building capacities, developing opportunities for health workers, and strengthening health systems through a comprehensive vision.

I wish the next President of the Directing Council every success in conducting this Session and reiterate my gratitude for the opportunity afforded Paraguay to serve at the helm of this prestigious Governing Body.

My sincere thanks to the PAHO support team.

Finally, great success to all of you during these working sessions!

Thank you.