



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



52nd DIRECTING COUNCIL
65th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

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**CLOSING REMARKS BY DR. CARISSA F. ETIENNE, DIRECTOR
PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU**

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**4 October 2013
Washington, D.C.**

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

Honorable Madam President
Honorable Ministers of Health
Ambassadors
Invited Guests
Esteemed Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen

A very Good Morning to you all.

Today is Friday the fourth of October 2013. Today, we have come to the end of the Fifty-second Meeting of the PAHO Directing Council. What a week we have had! During this short journey we were privileged to witness democracy, solidarity and Pan-Americanism in action as we collectively grappled with sensitive but vital issues such as the need to ensure equitable access to health care for our vulnerable populations such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, as well as the need to ensure that we in the Americas continue to protect our families against vaccine-preventable diseases through the timely provision of high-quality, affordable vaccines made available via the PAHO Revolving Fund. I saw passion coupled with evidence-based decision-making, and I have absolutely no doubt that this indomitable spirit of cooperation and collaboration will take the Organization progressively forward, as we encounter future challenges on this ever changing global stage on which we work.

On this week's journey, I also heard new and innovative ideas for improving our work, ranging from the use of sand art to communicate the human impact of neglected diseases, to the application of new medical and information technologies for improved health-care delivery. These collectively suggest that our Organization will continue to thrive, grow and evolve in this twenty-first century as a result of the overwhelming fountain of new ideas generated by you, our Member States. We have also heard of best practices in a number of areas, including efforts to address the social determinants of health through comprehensive, multi-sectoral, all-of-society and all-of-government approaches.

During our journey this week, we demonstrated that we were not afraid to anticipate the future as we grappled with the pressing issues of the post-2015 Development Agenda and recognized that health must be a foundation stone of this architecture, for unhealthy human populations cannot effectively contribute to the sustainable development of our countries.

Additionally, it became clear that we have all set our sights on universal health coverage as the overarching framework for advancing health. Indeed, a clear Pan-American consensus has emerged that universal health coverage is essential if we are to improve human health and well-being; to eradicate or eliminate diseases; to reduce morbidity and mortality gaps; and to especially reduce those inequities that perpetuate human suffering in our countries, thus inhibiting the full realization of human dignity and human potential and preventing the full participation of each and every person in our Region's development.

Fittingly, universal health coverage is the centerpiece of the strategic plan that you approved this week to guide PAHO's work over the next six years. We have heard and will heed your advice regarding the need to sharpen our indicators and to continue the process of collaborative consultations, so that together we can shape it into an even more useful roadmap. As we move forward under this plan, we will keep our eyes focused on the future, but without forgetting our unfinished agenda. Together, we will make good use of the time remaining to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and we will continue to aggressively address neglected diseases, while we grapple simultaneously with the new challenges presented by the chronic diseases, as well as those new and re-emerging infectious diseases. We in the Secretariat will walk with you, our Member States, and we are confident that you will continue to support and accompany us on this well-travelled road.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our President, the esteemed Minister of Health of Ecuador, for her expert handling and able management of the agenda of this 52nd Directing Council meeting. Additionally, I would like to recognize the Vice President of this Directing Council, the Honorable Minister of Health of Bolivia. On behalf of you all, I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Margaret Chan, our Director-General, for her words of advice and guidance to the Secretariat and for her exhortation to the countries of the Americas to continue to exercise the health leadership for which they have become well-known.

I am also very grateful for Geneva's support on a number of agenda items including the International Health Regulations, so that the Member States of the Region of the Americas were able to benefit directly from the expertise and experiences of technical staff drawn from across all levels of the World Health Organization.

I would like to convey my sincerest thanks to you the Member States for your active and informed participation in this meeting and to underscore that I highly value both your praise as well as your criticisms, when indicated, as without these our motivation to change and improve may wane.

To my fellow PAHO Secretariat colleagues, I say a special thank-you to each of you for standing with me as your new Director—for if we are divided, we cannot stand—and for all your arduous preparatory work that has contributed to making this 52nd Directing Council, a journey that has been well worth taking.

Thank you very much and I wish you all a safe passage back to your homes.

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