



57th DIRECTING COUNCIL

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

Washington, D.C., USA, 30 September-4 October 2019

CD57/DIV/3
Original: English

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

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

**30 September 2019
Washington, D.C.**

**57th Directing Council of PAHO
71st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Outgoing President of the 56th Directing Council, Honorable Dr. Duane Sands, Minister of Health of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas
Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States of America, Honorable Dr. Alex Azar II
Honorable Ministers and Secretaries of Health of PAHO-WHO Member States
Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Distinguished Member State Delegates
Eminent Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations in formal relations with the Pan American Health Organization
Representatives of the United Nations and Other Specialized Agencies
Representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States
Fellow PAHO and WHO Colleagues
Honored Guests
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen

A very Good Morning to you all.

This morning I stand before you with a sense of deep gratitude for your presence at this the Fifty Seventh Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Seventy First Session of the Regional Committee of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the Americas.

I am honored and privileged to be able to extend a very warm welcome to everyone assembled here today. I recognize that many of you participated in the United Nations General Assembly last week, so I am extremely pleased that you made a special effort to be with us here in Washington, D.C., before returning to your respective home countries.

Before proceeding any further, I would like to take this moment- on behalf of all of us- to publicly extend to the Government and peoples of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas our sincerest and heartfelt condolences in relation to the tremendous loss of life, the injuries, the utter devastation and destruction of property and the extensive dislocation and psychological trauma resulting from the catastrophic rampage of Hurricane Dorian upon the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama.

As I had stated during my recent post-Dorian visit to your country, I wish to reiterate once again that we stand in empathy with you and it is in solidarity that we re-commit to working with you to ensure the speedy re-establishment and effective functioning of your health system and services on those two islands. We are confident that your people will find within themselves that irrepressible and resilient spirit to recover and rebuild their beloved homeland.

I believe that it would be appropriate if we all rise now and observe one minute of silence in remembrance of all of those precious lives that were cut short by Hurricane Dorian.

Thank you all very much.

Changing gears On behalf of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and on my own behalf I would like to convey our genuine thanks and appreciation to you- our Member States- for your enduring support and astute guidance over the past 116 years and 9 months. Your continued collaboration and support are tangible evidence of a bond that we share and I truly believe that this bond is cemented by a vision that we have created together - a vision that is focused on improving the lives, health and well-being of all of the peoples in the Region of the Americas.

While you will have read much about our accomplishments during the past year in the 2019 Annual Report of the Director, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly highlight some of our specific successes that have been detailed in the 2019 Global Monitoring Report entitled Primary Health Care on the Road to Universal Health Coverage, which was launched last week in New York.

This report notes that in 2017, the Region of the Americas achieved the highest average UHC Service Coverage Index of 79 out of 100 suggesting greater utilization of health services particularly in the area of infectious diseases as well as in reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health. This index which measures progress on SDG indicator 3.8.1 increased from a global average of 45 out of 100 in 2000 to 66 in 2017. We should, therefore, be extremely proud of the fact that the regional average for the Americas significantly exceeds the global average and that of every other WHO Region.

In our Region, there has also been an increase in public expenditure in health expressed as a percentage of GDP from an average of 3.8 to 4.2 percent over the last five

years. While the global levels of catastrophic health expenditure- defined as large out-of-pocket spending in relation to household consumption or income- increased continuously between 2000 and 2015, the Region of the Americas was the only WHO region in which the absolute number and percentage of the population with catastrophic health spending declined between 2010 and 2015.

In the area of tobacco consumption, while the number of women who are current smokers decreased in all WHO regions, the decline among men occurred almost exclusively in the Region of the Americas and the European Region, both of which have stronger tobacco control policies. This is reflected in the declining mortality trends attributed to tobacco use in the Americas and Europe.

In May 2018, Dr. Tedros announced a global call to action towards the elimination of cervical cancer, underscoring the need for renewed political will to make elimination a reality, and appealing to all stakeholders to unite behind this common goal.

However, PAHO's pioneering work in the area of HPV vaccine introduction, which began in 2005, has borne significant fruit as this monitoring report indicates that 91 percent of the countries in Latin America and 57 percent of countries in the Caribbean have included HPV vaccine in their routine immunization plans. Latin America and the Caribbean lead every other Region except Western and Central Europe and North America, where HPV vaccine inclusion rates are 100 percent.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there can be no doubt that we -as a Region- are making significant and tangible progress on the road towards achieving universal health coverage and universal access to health. However, we must also truthfully acknowledge that our collective actions need to be more transformational as we are not progressing either at the speed nor scale required to meet the SDGs by 2030.

Recognizing the universal, indivisible and integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is very evident that the achievement of its stated goals for a healthier, more sustainable and equitable world, ensuring that no one is left behind, is very much premised upon joint action and cooperation. I, therefore, feel constrained to draw to your attention some of the larger national, regional and global challenges that we face today, which if not addressed will negatively impact our collective ability to deliver on this ambitious agenda.

While all of us would unequivocally agree that nation states have a fundamental responsibility to serve their citizens first, we must concur that the degree of interconnectedness in our highly globalized world also obligates nation states to work together cooperatively for mutual global good across many areas. Some of these areas include global warming and climate change, the prevention of rapid and uncontrolled infectious disease spread, antimicrobial resistance, mass migration and the production of

safe food and water, among others, issues for which the risks, challenges and potential impacts extend beyond national borders.

In the Preface to The Global Risks Report 2019, the President of the World Economic Forum noted that given the global challenges that we face today, there has never been a more pressing need for a collaborative and multi-stakeholder approach to shared global problems.

We are also witnessing the intensification of other global risks, including: A rise in polarization in some countries as the social contracts that usually hold societies together appear to be fraying; An escalation in geo-political and geo-economic tensions amongst the world's major powers; and An expansion in environmental risks related to climate change and extreme weather events together with their impacts on sea levels, biodiversity, etc as well as policy failures in relation to climate-change mitigation and adaptation.

Technological risks such as cyber-attacks, societal risks such as large-scale involuntary migration and economic risks such as high structural unemployment or underemployment are also significant issues on today's global risk landscape. Further, these structural factors and global risks are also impacting the quality of life for people as many are becoming increasingly anxious, unhappy and lonely.

I take this opportunity to share with you a particularly critical challenge that the Bureau has encountered in relation to our current financial situation- which has the real potential to negatively impact our ability to deliver the technical cooperation to which we have agreed with you- our valued Member States.

As you are all aware, your Assessed Quota Contributions constitute the foundational base of the Organization's budget. As at 20th September 2019, the cumulative balance of assessed contributions owed to PAHO was \$123.1 million. Of this sum, \$98.4 million represents unpaid Assessed Contributions for 2019 or 88 percent of the total contributions anticipated for this year. This is an unprecedented situation for the Organization, which has always received more than 50 percent of current year assessments by September.

As a result of the delayed receipt in Assessed Contributions, the Organization has had to utilize \$21.7 million from its Working Capital Fund and an additional \$33.0 million in other unrestricted funds in order to continue uninterrupted, the implementation of the portion of the Program and Budget funded by Assessed Contributions.

This year's payment delays in quota contributions by one or more Member States have had a profound detrimental effect on the financial status of the Organization and put at risk the effective implementation of the Program and Budget approved by the Member States. As a result, the Organization will have drastically reduced cash resources

to meet the basic general fixed operating expenses at the start of 2020, let alone, its agreed technical cooperation agenda.

Delegates of Member States, I have every confidence that with your concerted effort and support, we will overcome this and other challenges- underscored by your uncompromising commitment to achieving universal health coverage and universal access to health services for all. We cannot fail the peoples of this Region. 2030 is only eleven years away and I remain hopeful that you will continue to provide not only your wise counsel but also your vital financial support through assessed and national voluntary contributions.

Your past financial contributions have helped us to provide the technical leadership and guidance for the Region to successfully eradicate small pox; to eliminate poliomyelitis, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome; to introduce many new vaccines such as the Human Papillomavirus Virus [HPV] vaccine against cervical cancer into national immunization programs; to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV and congenital syphilis; to strenuously advocate for the use of anti-retroviral therapy thereby reducing the devastating mortality that was attributable to AIDS; to implement the International Health Regulations through building Member States' core capacities and to respond to emergencies and natural disasters within 24 hours, thereby, enhancing regional and global health security.

Your continued financial contributions are essential if we are to protect and sustain the public health gains that we have achieved to date; if we are to work together to extend healthy years of life in this Region; and if we are to give greater attention to mental health and the non-communicable diseases in order to improve the lifelong chances for individuals, all of which are cost-effective means of accelerating sustainable development.

Going forward, we must work with unrelenting vigor and an unfettered belief that anything is possible. If we imagine it and are passionate about getting it done, then we can do it.

Friends, Colleagues and Partners....

I can imagine the Region of the Americas as one in which every child born here will receive a complete course of vaccines appropriate for their age and that he or she will survive and thrive well past their eightieth birthday.

I can imagine every woman of child-bearing age in our Region having access to quality prenatal, post-natal and other health services including cervical cancer screening. I can imagine every man, woman and child including those living in vulnerable conditions having ready access to first level health facilities that deliver quality and excellent care without leading to financial impoverishment and without leaving anyone behind. I can

imagine national health systems that are more resilient and will be more capable of scaling-up their actions in response to disasters.

The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 -The Future Is Now- clearly states that success of the 2030 Agenda depends on the cooperation of governments, institutions, agencies, the private sector and civil society across various sectors, locations, borders and levels.

Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen....

Allow me to share with you the story of six and a half month old, Mateo Jara, who was born at the Nanawa Maternity Health Center, a primary health care facility in Paraguay's El Chaco Region on the Argentinian border. This little boy and his mother, Norma, represent a significant development in health for their nation as for the first time in many years, Paraguayan women residing in rural border communities- such as Nanawa, Jose Domingo Falcon and the villages of Chacoi and Beterete- have been able to give birth safely to children at national public health service clinics in their country.

These clinics are foundational to a regional strategy offering primary health care through family health units. These units are the first point of access in a comprehensive service network that integrates family planning programs, prenatal care, and obstetrical services.

They are part of the Border Health Strategy - embraced by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare of Paraguay together with local governments on both sides of the border- that was developed with PAHO's technical cooperation. The strategy is enabled through active and meaningful collaboration between the governments of Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil, as well as the local mayors and, of course, the dedicated health service providers in rural and indigenous communities participating in the El Gran Chaco Sudamericano Project.

This week, as we discuss and debate a range of policy and programmatic issues, please take a moment to think about Mateo and Norma and the many health and administrative professionals of the El Gran Chaco Sudamericano Project, who represent the best outcome of our vision for what we in PAHO can achieve.

It is my sincere hope that we will have a very successful and productive week under your expert guidance and visionary leadership as we collectively seek to chart a unified course for achieving progress towards the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Health Agenda. We recognize that we will encounter rough seas as we sail, but we will continue to constantly scan the horizon, critically examining a wide variety of data and information in order to identify potential threats, risks, emerging issues and opportunities, and as a consequence, allow for greater preparedness and the incorporation of mitigation actions into our policy making processes.

I have every confidence that together we will safely and successfully reach our designated port of call without having left anyone behind, as we would be sailing under the flag of Pan American solidarity, under-pinned by our core values of equity, excellence, respect and integrity.

Before concluding, I would like to extend to the President of the Inter-American Development Bank- the Honorable Luis Alberto Moreno- our sincerest congratulations on the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the IDB. Although the IDB is one of the main sources of long-term financing for the economic, social and institutional development of Latin America and the Caribbean, we have been proud to partner with them as their stated mission is one to improve lives. In furtherance of this mission, we wish the IDB a very long, productive and successful future.

Additionally, on your behalf, I would like to convey our sincerest congratulations to Costa Rica for their Champion of the Earth award that was bestowed by the United Nations in recognition of their policy leadership and efforts in protecting the environment, including the use of renewable energy sources and ongoing reforestation.

We need many more Member States in the Americas to stand up and become credible champions of the earth. I am aware that last week during the UN Climate Action Summit, 13 countries from the Americas made specific commitments to achieve safe air quality for their populations and to have aligned their climate change and air pollution policies by 2030.

Our final congratulatory message is to Colombia on the occasion of the Measles and Rubella Leadership Award that was presented to President Duque on behalf of the partners of the Measles and Rubella Initiative during last week's UN General Assembly. This award recognized his notable leadership in addressing the health needs of migrants, including the control of measles and other vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks.

In conclusion, my team and I are here to serve you so that you can effectively discharge your duties and responsibilities in relation to this Fifty Seventh Directing Council. Please do not hesitate to call on us over these next few days for anything that you may need.

Finally, I would like us to remind ourselves that we are both the custodians of today as well as the architects of tomorrow. Let us, therefore, be watchful, worthy and prudent custodians as well as judicious architects, embracing that spirit of noble generosity.

Once again, it gives me immense pleasure to extend a very warm welcome to you all to our house of heath in the Americas.

I thank you.
