

## **57th DIRECTING COUNCIL**

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

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**REMARKS BY DR. REINA GISELA ROA RODRIGUEZ  
UPON RECEIVING THE PAHO AWARD  
FOR HEALTH SERVICES MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP 2019**

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

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

Good afternoon

President of the Directing Council of PAHO  
Dr. Carissa Etienne, Director of PAHO  
Members of the Directing Council  
Staff Members of PAHO/WHO

On many occasions I have taken the floor in this room to make proposals and seek consensus on national and regional subjects of interest to public health. I have emphasized health as a human right—a fundamental value of health systems that is only possible to the extent that we can achieve the collective participation of governments, civil society, and the general population.

Taking action to strengthen national health systems based on primary health care, focusing our efforts on attending to the health needs of the population with emphasis on those who are most vulnerable, and making health promotion the linchpin and driving force of our work is, without a doubt, the best possible way to protect health.

Today you are honoring me with the 2019 PAHO Award for Health Services Management and Leadership. It is my belief that this is possible only through the collective work and effort of many social actors in my country, in the Region of the Americas, and around the world. Our challenge is to focus on the search for equity and on closing the gaps in health that have a daily impact on the most vulnerable populations.

Writing these words brought to mind my first experiences in public health during the 1990s, working in human resources, a vast field that has captivated me ever since. Today, I remain convinced that no achievement is possible without effective, integrated, and comprehensive management of the roles and leadership of the people who work in health. Thinking back on my own actions in the performance of my duties as national director and public health expert, my conclusion is that interactions among the people in

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an organization should flow within a framework of respect and justice. It is not about being nice; it is about being fair.

A grain of sand is not sufficient to transform health management, but it does contribute to the process of continuous change that is required in our countries, institutions, and health services, as well as in organizations such as PAHO and WHO. I thank God for the opportunity to contribute along with other health professionals to the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in our country, in the Region, and worldwide. Without a doubt, this is a historic milestone and an important precedent for public health and the health of our countries. We did our utmost to contribute, together with other delegates, to the process of WHO reform and to the construction of the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018-2030 and the regional Strategic Plan for 2020-2025. Our sole interest was to achieve greater well-being and health for our peoples.

When I wrote these lines, I was in the Ngabe Buglé region, the home of one of the most vulnerable populations in my country. Together with a group of investigators and health officials, I was preparing the implementation of the National Health Survey, with great expectations of results for the design of a new health policy to improve access and quality in the health services. Putting our knowhow and hopes into training, service, and contributions to the health of our countries is one of the challenges that most motivates us to continue working for public health, the right to health, and a healthier world. I believe the effective and efficient management of health services is on the horizon. Though it may seem distant, it is possible to get there if each and every one of us joins in. In my country, the PAHO office plays a vitally important role.

I humbly accept this award and I share it with all my colleagues at the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Panama.

Thank you very much.

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