

## **57th DIRECTING COUNCIL**

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

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

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

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**4 October 2019  
Washington, D.C.**

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

President of the 57th Directing Council, Honorable Daniel Salas, Minister of Health of  
Costa Rica  
Distinguished Delegates of Member States, Participating States, Associate Members,  
and Observer States  
Honorable Ambassadors  
Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations in formal relations with the Pan  
American Health Organization  
Representatives of the United Nations and Other Specialized Agencies  
Fellow PAHO staff  
Esteemed ladies and gentlemen

A Very Good Morning to You All

Ladies and Gentlemen...

We have come to the end of this the 57th Directing Council Meeting of the Pan American Health Organization and the 71st Session of the Regional Committee of the World Health Organization for the Americas.

Despite underlying tensions that threatened this meeting, I am extremely gratified to note that in the end we came together- in one of the best examples of Pan American solidarity- to take collective action in the noblest interest of public health. And for that, I want to sincerely thank each of you for your active participation and engagement, your diligent work and wise guidance, and the enduring spirit of empathy and unity that was displayed. During these five days, we successfully addressed 35 agenda items; participated in six side events; reviewed five progress reports and approved 15 resolutions.

We approved the new Strategic Plan, which will guide PAHO's technical cooperation with our member countries over the next six years. Thanks to your leadership, this plan was developed around your priorities, your needs and our collective

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vision of health for all- leaving no one behind. It sets out an inter-programmatic approach, with an emphasis on comprehensive, integrated, and quality health services and systems based on primary health care and innovative models of care. It defines what is needed to achieve the 11 goals of the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas.

We approved seven new strategies, plans and initiatives that all make important contributions to the transformation of our health systems. The new Strategy and Plan of Action on Health Promotion within the context of the SDGs commits all of us to a much fuller incorporation of health promotion into our health systems.

We approved an ambitious but attainable initiative to accelerate efforts to eliminate more than 30 diseases and conditions. This is an area in which the Americas has historically excelled, but where our focus on a life-course approach, intersectoral participation, and strengthening of primary health care will be key to our future success.

We recommitted ourselves to taking greater advantage of the digital revolution in order to strengthen our information systems for health, which is absolutely critical requisite for successful transformation of our health systems.

We approved an important strategy to improve the quality of care for everyone, so that everyone has access to timely, efficient, safe, and quality health services that leave no one behind.

We also approved a strategy for making access to organ, tissue, and cell transplants more equitable. This will save lives and improve quality of life for many in our Region.

We recommitted ourselves to accelerating the elimination of trans-fatty acids from industrially processed foods, which has been a major contributor to the burden of cardiovascular disease and deaths.

Ladies and Gentlemen.... The distinguished Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities has defined 12 important recommendations for addressing structural inequalities that impede the achievement of universal health as well as our countries' overall social and economic development. In this regard, our new Strategy and Plan of Action on Ethnicity and Health provides a timely roadmap for tackling the structural discrimination that creates health disparities for indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, Roma populations, and other ethnic groups.

We have also reviewed the recommendations of the High-Level Commission on Universal Health in the 21st Century for refocusing health reform processes on the core

principles and elements of the primary health care strategy and reaffirmed the compact Primary Health Care 30/30/30.

We reviewed progress reports on strategies and plans of action that are still under implementation or have come to conclusion. We were reminded of the work that remains to be done in critical areas, including public health preparedness and essential public health functions, vaccine-preventable diseases, adolescent health, and the health needs of our aging populations, among others.

We in the Secretariat are- as committed as you are- to continue our joint efforts to strengthen health action in all of these areas taking a comprehensive, inter-programmatic, and equity-seeking approach to strengthening health systems.

I do acknowledge that the challenges we face as a Region are taking us through some stormy weather and very choppy waters. However, I remain optimistic that together we will reach the 2030 SDG shores safely, because in health, perhaps more than any other area, I believe that we will continue to agree on the importance and value of solidarity.

As was true more than a century ago when PAHO was created, I believe that today, health is a bridge that can bring us closer. I am confident that we will go forward together, and our Region will continue to be a pioneering example of solidarity and success in health.

In closing and on behalf of all of us, I would like to convey our special thanks and deep appreciation to our President- Daniel Salas, the Minister of Health of Costa Rica- for his steady hand and skillful management in presiding over this 57th Directing Council. I would also like to express our sincerest gratitude to the Minister of Health of Jamaica, the Representative of the Executive Committee as well as to our Rapporteur, who discharged their respective functions with diligence and excellence.

I also wish to thank our own Deputy Director, Dr. Isabella Danel, for her dedicated work as Secretary; to our Governing Bodies Office for their efficient planning, management and execution of all matters related to this meeting; and to all of our staff at the Secretariat, for their tireless efforts, sterling contributions and magnanimous support, both during and prior to this week's meeting. Finally, on behalf of all of the delegates, I would like to extend a whole-hearted thank-you to our talented interpreters, without whom we would not have been able to conduct our work in an efficient and seamless manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen...I know that you are all very eager to be on your way home, so I will not keep you any longer. But once again, I congratulate and thank you all for a

job well-done and I do look forward to your continued unstinting support, active engagement and unwavering solidarity with the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. Have a safe journey home.

Thank you all very much.

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