



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
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**REMARKS BY THE U.S. SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES
THE HONORABLE MIKE LEAVITT**

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**AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE
27th PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE**

Washington, D.C., 1 October 2007

Thank you, Doctor [Mirta Roses, PAHO Director], for that introduction.

I appreciate the leadership you have displayed here over the past five years, and would like to congratulate you on your coming re-election.

I look forward to your second term as you continue to improve the transparency and good governance of this important organization.

It's also good to see Dr. Cristina Beato again today. As you know, Cristina left HHS to join PAHO as Deputy Director this spring. Frankly, we miss her at HHS. But I know that her talents are being put to good use here.

It is a distinct honor to share a podium here with such an esteemed and accomplished group of friends and neighbors. Thank you for making the trip to be here today, and moreover, for your tireless commitment to helping those in need.

This is a commitment that we feel very strongly about here in the United States, and are working hard to live up to.

Last month, I traveled to four countries in Africa to visit our partners who are fighting the twin scourges of AIDS and malaria. I must tell you that the magnitude of the need for this help was breathtaking. Too many children have been orphaned by AIDS. Too many parents have lost children to malaria.

But I am also pleased to report to you that these commitments are making a very real impact in the lives of people in need. And they were not shy about expressing their gratitude. It was an inspiring trip, to say the least.

While the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the President's Malaria Initiative focus largely on Africa, other programs underway are specifically targeted to help people in Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

When I spoke with you in April, I talked to you about the President's Initiative to Advance the Cause of Social Justice in the Western Hemisphere. A key part of that plan focuses on meeting basic needs for education, housing, and health care.

Since April, we have made some significant progress on health care.

With our partners in Central America, we have opened a Regional Training Center in Panama to train health-care workers throughout Central America for service in their home countries.

Tomorrow, I will meet with Panama's new Minister of Health, Dr. Rosario Turner, to follow up on our work. We will sign a Memorandum of Understanding on the partnership between my Department and the Ministries of Health of our six Central American partners.

The Memorandum will build on our collaboration in establishing the Regional Training Center and allow us to further extend our partnership to improve health care in the region.

HHS' U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps is another valuable asset that we have committed to the region.

In June, we deployed Commissioned Corps officers aboard the U.S. Navy Ship *Comfort* to provide dental and other basic medical care in Central America and the Caribbean.

By the end of August, the *Comfort* had treated more than 64,000 patients for a broad range of conditions. Some received antibiotics to fight parasites and respiratory infections. Others underwent surgery to correct cataracts, hernias, and clubfeet.

The *Comfort's* dental teams performed over 3,000 extractions, 3,000 restorations, 5,000 sealants, and 13,000 applications of fluoride varnish. I would like to thank you for your partnership in this effort. With Dr. Beato's help, PAHO purchased the sealants and varnishes we used during the *Comfort's* missions.

I flew out to visit the ship last month when it stopped in Haiti. I can tell you firsthand how much this care meant to the people receiving it. They knew that, without our help, they would simply never have been able to receive this basic care—care that truly changed their lives.

One thing became very clear during my trips to Africa and to Haiti this summer: Health care is truly an international language of caring. Everywhere we went, people understood, without a word being said, that we were their friends.

The efforts I have described today are a meaningful start to an important change, but they are just a start. There is so much more to do—both in providing care directly, and in training more health workers so they can provide high-quality care in their communities.

I know that many of you today are engaged in similar work, both at home and elsewhere. I applaud the work you are doing, and I want you to know that the President and I are fully committed to this effort.

I look forward to continuing our strong partnership through PAHO to speak to those in need in the “language of caring,” and to share health and well-being with those less fortunate.

Thank you.