



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



48th DIRECTING COUNCIL
60th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Washington, D.C., USA, 29 September-3 October 2008

CD48/DIV/1
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR OF
THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU
DR. MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO**

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR OF
THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU
DR. MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO**

**ADDRESS TO THE 48.^o DIRECTING COUNCIL, 60.^a SESSION OF
THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE AMERICAS**

Washington, DC, USA, 29 September 2008

Thank you very much, Mr. President-- President, I might add, of this year's World Health Assembly as well.

Welcome all of you to our common home, the Home for Health in the Americas, especially those of you who are visiting us for the first time.

This is a good time to thank you for your trust and support in our common efforts to promote public health in the Americas; to thank the Member States, our host, the United States of America, and the observers; the institutions of the Inter-American system-- especially, the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, his Excellency José Miguel Insulza; and the agencies and entities that cooperate with our work.

My special thanks to Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, who honors us on this occasion with her presence here, instead of availing herself of modern technology, as she did to good effect when I took office-- technology that we recognize has the great advantage of permitting her message to be heard worldwide without subjecting her to the rigors of excessive travel.

This capacity to innovate, investigate, and try out new things is, incidentally, one of the areas that will receive special consideration in our deliberations. We will review the proposals for action to strengthen vital and health statistics, as well as the relationship between public health, innovation, and intellectual property, as part of our integral efforts to promote evidence-based policies.

We are acting in this manner because our commitment, each of us in his own area but cognizant that all of us are connected in a network to improve public health, is to obtain results. This demands self-criticism to examine the progress toward meeting noble and ambitious targets, such as those contained in the Development Goals of the Millennium Declaration, and timely action to adopt the necessary measures for meeting them, such as the Regional Strategy and Plan of Action for Neonatal Health within the Continuum of Maternal, Neonatal, and Child Care. It also demands solidarity among the Member States, a distinctive feature of public health in our Region, exemplified once again with the recent launch of the Action NOW for the Lives of Mothers, Newborns, and Children Initiative. This notable example of horizontal cooperation and

solidarity among developing countries has the support of the Prime Minister of Norway and a network of political leaders, headed in our Region by President Bachelet and President Lula.

In this regard, we congratulate Dr. Chan on her successful activities in New York and thank all the many authorities and First Ladies of the Region, who have made the improvement of maternal, neonatal, and child care a high political priority.

Solidarity also implies a resolute struggle against inequity and poverty and their terrible consequences for public health. For this reason, activities are moving forward to promote social protection and equitable access to quality health services, expressed in the proposals to make progress in the elimination of neglected diseases and in staunch promotion of the primary health care strategy, among other initiatives, as well as support to the priority countries, with special emphasis on collaborative health efforts in Haiti.

It is clear that measures to reduce the risk and burden of disease, as proposed in the Regional Strategy and Plan of Action for Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control and in efforts for the prevention and management of diabetes and obesity, to cite but two examples, should be viewed in the context of health determinants and action to address them. This makes the analysis of climate change and its impact on public health that we will undertake especially valuable; this phenomenon has been the focus of much of our efforts this year and, as the latest evidence revealed some days ago clearly indicates, it is intensifying at a rate that exceeds even the grimmest scientific predictions. The consequences are, unfortunately, very real. Many Ministers were, understandably, unable to be here today because they are grappling with the consequences of the severe hurricane season in the Caribbean. To them, as always, our solidarity and support.

We have major challenges ahead of us, then, and opportunities to take advantage of. We who have devoted our efforts to the mission of public health will address them with our characteristic sense of responsibility and commitment. All of our staff in the PAHO secretariat have devoted considerable efforts to preparing the most appropriate scenario for the Council's deliberations, awaiting its orientations and mandates. I hope and am certain that at the end of the week we will be able to boast with satisfaction of our achievements in that endeavor, in the purest tradition of this century-old institution that is our home.