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Commentary: Vaccination - An act of love that transcends borders

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Vaccination is one of the most effective and efficient ways to put health within the reach of all. It combines individual well-being with family and social well-being:

1. that of the rich with that of the poor
2. that of children with that of the elderly
3. that of citizens with that of foreigners
4. that of rural inhabitants with that of city dwellers
5. that of residents with that of migrants.

In fact, just as with threats to health, the benefits of vaccination know no borders.



**Mirta Roses-Periago is the Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).
AFP PHOTO**

This makes it even more satisfying that the Sixth Vaccination Week in the Americas currently in progress has an unprecedented number of vaccination programs at the binational (in Panama and all of Central America, as well as Mexico and the United States) or trinational (in several points of South America) levels. This is thanks to the joint efforts of the respective Ministries of Health with the support of PAHO.

This week thus constitutes in itself a legitimate expression and an indelible reminder of the best that Pan Americanism offers us, and of what we can achieve thanks to the consensus and leadership of PAHO member countries. This year, 62 million people will benefit directly from this ambitious project, consolidating in the Americas a true participatory culture through preventive health.

Indeed, this huge undertaking is only possible thanks to the participation of local and national governments, as well as nongovernmental organizations, international cooperation agencies, community leaders, artists committed to health, mass media, and, especially, health workers and volunteers. It is also of special importance that care is directed in particular to isolated and disadvantaged populations, in accordance with the goals, priorities, and needs of each country.

Hence, during this week some countries are emphasizing the unfinished agenda, ranging from identifying indigenous communities as priority groups (in South America), to vaccinating against measles and rubella in order to improve coverage and locate children with an incomplete vaccination series (in several Caribbean islands), and even to vaccinating against yellow fever, as they are doing in Paraguay, Colombia, and Trinidad and Tobago, to name a few examples.

Other countries are giving priority to protecting health achievements already attained— as in the case of several Central American, South American, and Caribbean nations—by administering all of the vaccines in order to complete the protection series, especially among high-risk groups and populations that live in areas difficult to access and with low coverage. There are also countries working to address new health challenges, introducing new vaccines such as the pneumococcal vaccine, hepatitis A vaccine, or the rotavirus vaccine.

By the end of this Vaccination Week in the Americas, more than 250 million people will have benefited during the six years of this initiative. Since 2006, Europe has taken up the initiative and the third European week launched April 21 encompasses 33 countries and has the same objectives. The Director-General of WHO has hailed this festival of participation through prevention and the strengthening of access to health services. We hope one day to be able to hold a global vaccination week. Vaccination is most certainly an act of love that transcends borders.