

**Reprinted from Caribbean Net News  
caribbeannetnews.com**

**Commentary: Common challenges, Joint solutions**

Published on Thursday, July 24, 2008

By Dr. Mirta Roses Periago, Director Pan American Health Organization

Our continent is so diverse in so many ways -- geographically, economically, socially, demographically, and culturally -- that paradoxes abound. One paradox that stands out, however, is particularly painful: for decades we have had the unfortunate distinction of having the most inequitable distribution of wealth of any region in the world.

This circumstance makes it even more important that we attain the Millennium Development Goals, which specifically address the deep-rooted causes of poverty and inequality. While there have been significant advances in several areas, we are also at the middle of the agreed deadline, and all of us—countries, regions, communities, governments, civil society, cooperating entities, and others—must redouble our efforts to push this progress forward.



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

It is not easy to get to the root of such deep-seated problems that often feed off one another. Hence, coordination is critical to the success of this effort, since the gains in one area should facilitate advances in another, and so on. The concept that common challenges demand joint solutions has prompted all the Directors for the Region of agencies in the United Nations system, under the coordination of the UNDP, to develop a joint work program.

We are meeting today for the specific purpose of formulating a work plan to ensure that specific achievements are attained over the next two years, with special emphasis on the development objectives related to childhood, nutrition, and maternal health. The Pan American Health Organization is honored to serve as the host on this particular occasion, as organization of these periodic meetings is rotated among the agencies.

Examination of the region's economic and social advances and challenges, particularly in the current context with its dangers and its opportunities for economic growth that reduces poverty, as well as a look at the demographic situation in Latin America and the Caribbean and its impact on development, will be coupled with an analysis of progress in the hemisphere in terms of the right to health.

We are particularly interested in seeing that the biennial joint work plan incorporates strategies that focus on vulnerable areas. Thus, we will study such initiatives as preparation of an atlas of subnational vulnerability and the challenges facing the most vulnerable municipalities; the approach to Faces, Voices, and Places in order to overcome disparities that certain communities suffer even when national indicators are satisfactory; a vision of

the region's environmental sustainability; and the Pan American Partnership on Nutrition and Development directed toward finding collective solutions to the food crisis.

Large and complex problems demand agreed-upon actions that complement one another. Hence, the regional agencies of the United Nations are working together in a timely and effective manner to help make the development objectives of the Millennium Declaration a reality, and to fulfill the just aspirations of the entire population of the Americas.