



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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Oral delivery may differ from written remarks

Welcoming Remarks
Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary of Health and Human Services, United States of America
44th Directing Council – Pan American Health Organization
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Thank you, Dr. Mirta Roses, for that kind introduction. You have provided such excellent leadership for the Pan American Health Organization since your ascent to the Directorship last year. The United States is truly proud to count you as an ally and a friend, and looks forward to continuing to work closely with the new leadership of the Organization, including the new Deputy Director, Joxel García.

Let me also thank Minister Francisco Andino, both for his remarks and for his tremendous leadership at home and abroad.

It is an honor and a pleasure to be in your company today.

And it is especially an honor and a pleasure to welcome you all to the 44th Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization. The United States has always staunchly supported the work of PAHO, ever since representatives of the American republics gathered in Washington, D.C., in 1902 to address the pressing problems of disease and healthcare in our hemisphere.

I'm proud to note that Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, was strongly behind the creation of PAHO's predecessor. Let me assure you today that 101 years later, the 43rd President, George W. Bush, is just as committed and just as enthusiastic about PAHO and the cause of health in the Americas.

We are all citizens of this hemisphere ... our fates are linked ... and our values are the same. Every one of us here is committed to adequate health care ... safe drinking water ... eliminating measles and neonatal tetanus... preventing injuries ... and effective public health education for every one of our fellow-citizens. We have the same ethic of compassion, the same sense of service, and the same call to action.

And as our values are the same, so are our problems similar. Across the Americas, children face environmental hazards. Across the Americas, safe drinking water is too often a luxury. Across the Americas, men and women suffer from preventable and easily treated illnesses. Across the Americas, our families need strengthening, and we need more healthy marriages. And across the Americas, health care is too often too expensive and too remote.

My friends, I don't have all the answers to these challenges. The United States does not have all the answers to these challenges. But working together ... working through PAHO ... we just might begin to find some of those answers that we — and every family in the Americas — need.

That's why this Directing Council is so very important. It provides us with a crucial opportunity to exchange ideas, learn from each other and develop joint actions to promote health in our hemisphere. Here we can learn from one another ... renew relationships ... forge new partnerships ... and chart the future of public health in the Americas.

Isn't that a worthy project? How wonderful to see acts of policy that are also profound acts of compassion.

As we do our work, we will increase the linkage between North and South America, and bridge the cultural divides between our hemisphere's linguistic communities. We are truly blessed with our diversity of Spanish-speaking, Portuguese-speaking, English-speaking, French-speaking, and Dutch-speaking populations — not to mention our wealth of native, indigenous, Indian and aboriginal communities.

In this room we have representatives of every one of those communities, and descendants of immigrants from every corner of the earth. With Hispanics and Latinos now the largest minority group in my country, it's more clear than ever that the concerns of the Americas are the concerns of the United States.

Our mutual cooperation ... mutual concern ... and mutual compassion is a testament to our goodwill and good sense. We are all Americans, north, central, and south, and that common identity and common commitment to preserve human life and dignity is what unites us — and unites PAHO — in our great work.

My friends, PAHO achieved so much in its first century. Now, at the beginning of its second century, let us rededicate ourselves to its mission, and redouble our efforts to make the Americas a better place for all. Working together, we can.

I welcome you. The President welcomes you. The United States of America welcomes every one you, friends and neighbors, to the 44th Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization. Now let's get started. Bienvenidos!