



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

## **28th PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE**

### **64th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

*Washington, D.C., USA, 17-21 September 2012*

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**WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR  
OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU/REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION FOR THE AMERICAS**

**Dr. MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO**

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR  
OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU/REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION FOR THE AMERICAS**

**Dr. Mirta Roses Periago**

**17 September 2012**

**28th PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE  
64th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS  
Washington, D.C.**

Honorable Outgoing President of the Pan American Sanitary Conference  
Honorable Ministers of Health  
Honorable Assistant Secretary of Health of the United States of America  
Honorable Secretary-General of the Organization of American States  
Honorable Director-General of the World Health Organization  
Distinguished Delegates  
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning to you all! Please receive a hearty welcome to the “Americas Health House” on the occasion of the opening of the 28th Pan American Sanitary Conference, which coincides with the 110th anniversary of our Organization.

We extend our recognition to the outgoing President, to the authorities and delegations of our Member States, to our Associate Members and Observer States, to the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, to the Director-General of the World Health Organization and to its delegation, and to the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States, our host country. We equally extend our recognition to the representatives of sister organizations from the United Nations system, to the accredited nongovernmental organizations present here today, and to our special guests. It is your presence, my friends, that makes this occasion even more special.

For the past 110 years, this Organization has been making fundamental contributions to progress in public health and to improve the health of our hemisphere’s population. All this has come about thanks to the commitment of our Member States to the principles of Pan-Americanism—as well as to their permanent demonstration, not only of solidarity, but also of a spirit of cooperation and confidence. This has taken place with the backing received from our partners, who relied on the efforts and quality of extraordinary national and international teams united in their mission to achieve consensually established goals.

Details on what we have accomplished will be presented to this Conference in the *Quinquennial Report* and in the publication *Health in the Americas*, both of which show results that few of us could have imagined 11 decades back. As we celebrate these historic advances, let us take this opportunity to reflect upon the lessons learned and to set even higher goals as we acknowledge the enormous health gaps that persist both within countries and among them.

In order to do this, we shall need sustained political will. That, however, is manifest by your very presence here today, to participate in this meeting. We will also need to mobilize society as a whole, so that together we can overcome the historical determinants that block the road to achieving human security and sustainable development. Our common dream is for our continent to achieve the goal of “health for all” as soon as possible, recognizing the critical role played by public health in reaching levels of well-being that the peoples of the Americas need, expect, and deserve.

Eradicating and eliminating diseases that used to afflict our people has indisputably been a distinctive element of Pan American progress in the sphere of public health. In addition, it has represented an important contribution to progress made in other regions of the world, through interregional solidarity and by sharing our experiences.

Among the new challenges we now face, the most pressing is the increase in the incidence of chronic noncommunicable diseases. In all countries of the world, chronic diseases represent not only a serious threat to health and development alike, but also enormous difficulties for health systems. However, we also know that we can prevent them to a great extent, by modifying such risk factors as tobacco and alcohol consumption, an unhealthy diet, and a sedentary lifestyle. All of these call for changes in behavior and for involvement by all sectors of the government as well as by society at large. A year ago, the United Nations High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases—in which the Americas played a prominent role—put this issue at the forefront and generated a great degree of political commitment.

At the same time as the number of older adults is climbing rapidly, the number of young people living today in the Region is the highest in our history. This calls for devoting urgent attention to protecting and promoting the health of children and young people, so that the Americas can reach its full potential and build a future based on prosperity and well-being for all. However, persistent social exclusion, inequity, and inequalities—be they related to gender, geographical area, or ethnic group—all have detrimental effects on how children and adolescents develop, thus constituting one of the greatest challenges in the Region.

Addressing social and environmental determinants, both in the context of public policies and in partnership with the various sectors and social actors involved, is indispensable. In the twenty-first century with its highly informed and interconnected citizenry, it is only by doing so that our societies can move forward on a path of sustainable human safety and development, in peace and harmony with one another.

My friends,

The importance of the topics we shall be analyzing, the decisions we shall be making, and their impact on the future of the Organization—as well as on Pan American progress in health—are inevitably close to my heart, for this will be the last time that I will be participating as an active international civil servant in a Pan American Sanitary Conference.

My present position, one granted me ten years ago and subsequently renewed, has been the greatest honor that I could have ever received in a lifetime devoted to serving public health. I can say, with satisfaction, that I have worked intensely, tirelessly, and passionately—and that I will continue to do so, in response to your confidence and mandates, until the last moment of my term. I confess that I feel proud of the results that we have obtained together to serve the peoples of the Americas. Looking back on the path we have followed, with its achievements and learning experiences, and looking forward to the future already growing from the seeds we have sown, I am convinced that this Organization will continue to help produce extraordinary results in public health for many decades to come—thanks to the commitment of its Member States, the quality of its working teams, and the very strength of the principles of Pan-Americanism and solidarity, which both inspire and move us.

For your commitment, for your backing, for the friendship you have given me, and for your continuous contributions to the cause of public health in the Americas, please receive my heartfelt thanks.