



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



**51st DIRECTING COUNCIL**  
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**WELCOMING REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR  
OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU  
DR. MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO**

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**Dr. Mirta Roses Periago**

**26 September 2011**

**51st PAHO DIRECTING COUNCIL  
Washington, D.C.**

Honorable President  
Honorable Ministers of Health  
Distinguished Delegates  
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

A very good morning everyone! Today, the house of health in the Americas is decked out to welcome the Ministers of Health and delegations. Once again we are opening this annual forum, where we review our achievements, examine challenges and threats, and, above all, set the course for our future work in the continuing pursuit of health for all.

I would like to thank the Presidency, exercised so skillfully by Mexico during this past year and in particular, recognize the leadership and commitment of Secretary of Health José Ángel Córdova Villalobos, while welcoming the new Secretary, Salomón Chertorivski Woldenberg, and offering a special greeting to our distinguished guests, who honor us with their participation this week: the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius; Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO); and all the representatives of our sister agencies in the United Nations and Inter-American systems, as well as the accredited nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and special guests.

As we review the activities of the Member States and the Organization, we can find cause for satisfaction and hope in the attainments and positive track they are on in many aspects. However, also visible is the work that is still pending or behind schedule and the complex challenges facing us from a public health standpoint to fulfilling our commitment to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Our common purpose is, precisely, to analyze in depth the potential, constraints, tools, scientific knowledge, and experience gained in order to improve public health in the Americas. This is an occasion to turn thought into deeds and adopt new measures, review policies, correct our course, and adapt interventions, since it is the only way that we will achieve tangible benefits for the health of our people.

During this Council we will analyze the proposals contained in the Plan of Action to Accelerate the Reduction of Maternal Mortality and Severe Maternal Morbidity, since it is unacceptable that we still have very high rates of maternal mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean even though 95% of these deaths are preventable with the knowledge available today. The analysis and decision-making in this area will be enriched by the Panel on Safe Motherhood and Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health. Our sincere thanks to former President Michelle Bachelet, the Infanta Cristina, Dr. Margaret Chan, Mrs. Marcela Suazo, and Dr. Aníbal Faúndez for honoring us with their participation and for their contributions in this critical matter.

The challenges to attainment of the MDGs and their future beyond 2015 are joined by others, such as the commitments with respect to noncommunicable diseases, in line with the agreements of the United Nations High-level Meeting, which has just concluded, and the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health, scheduled for next month in Rio de Janeiro.

We live in the most urbanized Region in the developing world, at 79.4%, which is expected to increase to 85%, and this has occurred rapidly and without adequate planning, resulting in significant risks to the health of urban dwellers, and additional pressure on health services that has resulted in the exacerbation of inequalities. The Strategy and Plan of Action on Urban Health will make it possible to respond to this situation, with an emphasis on the participation of citizens and different sectors, to tackle issues that include air and noise pollution, environmental change, healthy behaviors and settings, human security, and spaces for recreation and physical activity, among many others. Adapting the health services, based on the primary health care strategy, ensuring that services get to where the people are, and providing social protection for the most vulnerable are essential for responding appropriately to the dynamic needs of the different population groups.

We remember and express our solidarity with the people and families of the Americas who this year have suffered the devastation of climatic events, such as the storms that have buffeted the Caribbean and the east coast of the United States; the serious floods and landslides that have stricken Brazil, Colombia, and Guatemala; and the droughts and fires, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes that have impacted significant parts of the Region. The effects of climate change on the food supply and food security, on the variety and distribution of vector-borne diseases, on the water supply, and the concentration of air pollutants; the resulting rise in sea level and the warming of the seas—which especially impact the Region’s island nations: all of this underscores the importance of the Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change that we will discuss in this Directing Council.

Responding to all the challenges I have mentioned, and to many others, requires concerted action on the social determinants of health, as well as a continuous process of innovation, rethinking, adaptation, and strengthening of health systems and services in order to improve their capacity to respond to rapidly changing needs. Both the regional consultation on WHO reform and the Strategy and Plan of Action on eHealth are fundamental aspects of this constant reinvention, so crucial to the continuing success of the immense social network for health.

This capacity to reinvent ourselves, to use the lessons we have learned to respond to new challenges, to provide early responses, to work tirelessly to close the gaps, to constantly build on our achievements and fight to sustain them, along with the audacity to imagine and, to a certain extent, anticipate the future, has long been a distinctive characteristic of the way our Organization works.

On behalf of the entire staff of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau who, along with health workers throughout the Region, day by day carry out the mission to protect and improve the health of our Hemisphere, I extend to you a most cordial and joyful welcome.