



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
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**ADDRESS OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AMBASSADOR ALBERT R. RAMDIN**

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



ADDRESS OF THE

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL
AMBASSADOR ALBERT R. RAMDIN**

TO THE PAHO 51st DIRECTING COUNCIL

Inaugural Session, 26 September, 2011

Dr. Salomon Chertorivsky Woldenberg, Secretary of Health of Mexico and President
of the Directing Council

Ministers of Health of the Americas

Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization

Dr. Mirta Roses, Director of the Pan American Health Organization

Ms. Kei Kawabata, Manager of the Social Sector of the Inter-American
Development Bank

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure and an honor for me, on behalf of the Organization of American States, to take part in the inauguration of the 51st Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization, one of the longest-standing institutions of the inter-American system and an entity with which the Organization of American States has permanent ties. I commend the Director of this Organization, Dr Mirta Roses, for her leadership in and commitment to improving the health of the peoples of the Americas. Dr Roses, it is always a pleasure working with you and your excellent team of experts on the many issues facing the Americas.

In addition to the highly important topics that this Council has on its agenda, this meeting offers us an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the meaning of our association, on the fact that we belong to the same inter-American system, something also true of the Inter-American Development Bank, and other technical agencies that are part of our system. To that extent, we must all work to ensure that our priorities and

actions are more interdependent, aligned and mutually reinforcing. Major global trends, which will increasingly influence the lives of many in our Hemisphere, require us to work together in a pro-active manner.

As Dr. Roses has reiterated on a number of occasions, PAHO works closely with the OAS to link our region's health priorities with the Hemisphere's policy agenda in fostering an environment of peace, stability and security. In so doing it underscores not only the specific spheres of our respective areas of responsibility, but also the crucial importance of the policy dimension in shaping and implementing public policies.

As many of you know, this year we mark the 10th anniversary of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. This important document, which provides us with a collective program for promotion and consolidation of democracy, as well as collective mechanisms for the defense and protection of democracy, underscores the interdependence between democracy, security and development.

As we all know, without health there is no development, and so, without health, democracy is weakened, and the security of our nations negatively affected. It is therefore impossible to speak of full democracy when there are people who lack basic health and sanitation services. That is why we must turn this relationship between democracy and development into a virtuous cycle, a cycle where, as the Democratic Charter states, democracy and development are not only interdependent, but also mutually reinforcing.

There is, without question, a link between the persisting levels of poverty in the region—characterized by uncertain access to basic health services, education, and housing—the shortcomings in terms of governance in our countries, and our peoples' perceptions of the quality of our democracies. In our region we have recognized that democracy is far more than a purely instrumental process that merely serves to elect those who govern us; it is also found in the workings of institutions, which are the instruments that enable opportunities to be democratized. Various opinion polls suggest a close correlation between satisfaction with democracy and the public's perception of the performance of the economy and access to services.

Good governance requires strong, effective and respected institutions capable of shaping and implementing, in conjunction with the private sector and civil society, the public policies needed to reach all segments of the population and by so doing continue the fight against social injustice, inequality and marginalization.

In this context, health policies have a pivotal role to play, particularly in terms of fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals and of promotion and observance of economic, social, and cultural rights, which are clearly enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

Last week, during the summit on non-communicable diseases, at the United Nations, important progress was made to recognize the threats NCD's pose on our economies and societies. But political commitment only will not do the job; it will require changes in attitudes and government policies to fight against NCD's since cancer, heart disease, diabetes and other illnesses have a significant economic impact on all the economies of the hemisphere, especially the small ones.

I also want to recognize and commend leaders and health ministers of the Caribbean Community for their role in placing this threat on the global agenda. By reaching out to counterparts in other regions to take joint action against NCD's, a historic resolution was passed. By uniting to stop the epidemic of chronic non-communicable diseases, countries, with the support of organizations like PAHO can see a difference in decades to come. The Western Hemisphere needs not only an educated, but also equally a healthy population to be able to be successful and prosperous.

Ladies and gentlemen, examples like these illustrate the potential that can be realized, from closer partnerships between organizations like ours. By linking our priorities on social matters and making them an integral part of the region's policy agenda, we can effectively ensure that health dimensions are included in the region's economic, social, and political integration and cooperation efforts, providing a platform from which to better confront the challenges of globalization. Let us not wait until the problems are in our face, the trends are here, the future is now. We must act today, individually and collectively, to preserve and maintain what has been achieved for tomorrow.

I thank you for your attention.