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**ADDRESS BY THE WINNER OF THE MANUEL VELASCO SUÁREZ
AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN BIOETHICS
DR. LAURA ADRIANA ALBARELLOS**

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Honorable President
Honorable Ministers of Health
Distinguished Delegates
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Members of the Board of Directors of the Pan American
Health and Education Foundation (PAHEF)
Dr. Mirta Roses, Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau
Family and Friends of Dr. Manuel Velasco Suárez
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I can imagine a world without barriers or distinctions, where diversity prevails; but it is impossible for me to imagine such a world without science at the service of humanity, without the goal of progress being the daily inspiration that drives our day-to-day endeavors.

Behind that ideal, and as an unfailing part of a society plagued with needs, my humble contribution to society is to present you with a scientific, legal-political bioethics project directed today to Mexican society as the basis for public policies that can even extend beyond the health sector.

The people of my adopted country suffer from many diseases and a range of other problems, but the country's highly skilled and advanced scientific community continues to struggle to devise the broad solutions needed to realize the dream of every public health system: preventive and diagnostic medicine. Given the recent cracking of the human genome, meeting the objective of Mexico's Magna Carta does not seem so far off: that is, the commitment to health, even for future generations. Health should be considered not only a bioethically environmental objective, but on the same plane as the overarching concepts and policy guidepost of all civilized nations. Here, then, are the basic ideas that I am presenting to you today from the perspective of my professional discipline, the law, as a personal challenge and basic contribution to achieving the fundamental objectives of a great country looking to the future.

A starting point to consider is the lack of models for developing, in a regulated and participatory manner, genetic population databases that respect the human rights of social agents and members of society, making society the foundation of essential state policies – the same society that makes a nation sound and respectful of the very principles inherent to human nature. Thus, this project proposes a systematic study of the prevailing social reality in Mexico, based on its vital constitutive and constituent core and the achievements and impact of public policies that cannot and should be beyond the legal structures that must be created or modified. This way, when these gene banks are set up, they will not fall into a legal limbo that creates a dangerous vacuum for the very beneficiary for whom they were intended—the people—or get trapped in indefensible philosophical debates.

Since 1999, through the creation of the Mexican Health Foundation, my country has been devoted to making the most of the human and scientific knowledge and potential for health inherent in the advances in genomics. In 2000, this effort obtained a government commitment to create a center for genomic medicine, with the support of the National University of Mexico, the Secretariat of Health, the National Board of Science and Technology, and the foundation itself. In 2002, a bill to create of the National Institute of Genomic Medicine was introduced, a process that was finalized in 2004 with the publication of the regulations creating the institute. In May 2009, the first phase of the Genome of the Mexican Population Project was published.

All of this is evidence of a commitment, as underscored in the Mexican policy agenda, to be at the forefront of scientific advances and provide solutions to public health problems as a fundamental interest of the state.

The work does not end here; instead, it serves as a foundation. A tenet of the national approach to science must be to create a legal regulatory body that enables this knowledge to be captured, strengthened, and transformed into concrete results. Without a doubt, it is necessary to conceive, construct, and implement a genetic database, with its gene bank, that will make it possible to collect and study the information compiled.

This proposed institution, born of interdisciplinary scientific and legal reflection, would support the application of other government policies—even those as far afield as public safety and the administration of justice—that guarantee social order and peace as a basic principle of

the ethics of nations, creating a just and efficient apparatus for health and the operations of the State. This is why it is imperative to explore the connection with the public policy administration, as there is no system that makes this essential linkage.

Creating a genetic database and gene bank will enable us to awaken the deepest essence of our being: our inherent membership in the immeasurable diversity that is humanity, and from there, to determine its specificities, its essence. This will enable all scientists to discover the realities characteristic of the population within a legal framework, and politicians to establish clear rules and allocate resources within the framework of the bioethical principle of justice, in order to develop preventive medicine for the specific illnesses of the Mexican population.

Finally, to respect your limited time and schedules, I can only thank you for the opportunity to speak before such a distinguished audience, to share my absolute conviction that my concerns are no different from yours, both in your honorable positions and as individuals. I haven't the slightest doubt that commitment and participation are cornerstones of the global organization that you have established.

In the same spirit embodied in the legacy of that honorable Mexican scientist and public official Dr. Manuel Velasco Suárez, and based on the premise that respect for human rights and the principles of bioethics must be the only preventive medicine injected into our daily life, I believe that our peoples' growth, supported by sound legal frameworks, is possible.

These very principles, and the example of Dr. Manuel Velasco Suárez, have encouraged me to present this project to you in the belief that, with your support, we can achieve major advances in public health in the nations of the Americas.