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**REMARKS BY THE WINNER OF THE SÉRGIO AROUCA AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE IN UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE
DR. MARCIA PALTOO**

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**51st DIRECTING COUNCIL OF PAHO
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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
Ladies and Gentlemen:

One day, four years ago, all of the directors of the Ministry of Health were called to a meeting. It was a Sunday. But this was important. We were to discuss a new strategy that would help strengthen our management of chronic disease and prevention in primary health care: the Integrated Management of Adult and Adolescent Illness (IMAI). Guyana had already implemented the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness and so we could build on this experience by adapting and adopting this PAHO/WHO strategy.

Instead of only treatment of acute illnesses, IMAI focused on the management and prevention of chronic disease: a chronic care model for universal health care delivery. IMAI also gave us the chance to address other areas for HIV/AIDS such as mental health. The strategy fit into existing services so that the health system can function more efficiently.

It would take more commitment, would mean more responsibility for each of us, but it was something that would promote equity and universal access in health care for people in all the regions of Guyana.

This was due to the vision of a remarkable person (the one who called that mandatory Sunday meeting) one who would constantly announce the future...today...and together we would have to find ways to realize that vision. In his eyes, it had already happened, and slowly but surely the pieces built that picture of IMAI that already existed in his mind.

It is because of him, I stand before you today accepting this award for a programme that has changed and continues to change the health of our peoples. He is an inspiration to public health professionals globally. I wish to publicly thank the exceptional vision, the tireless work and constant encouragement of our Minister of Health, one who has my utmost admiration and respect, (and it's not because he is my wonderful boss): the Honourable Dr. Leslie Ramsammy.

On behalf of the Ministry of Health, I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart:

- The Pan American Health Education Foundation and the Pan American Health Organization for the honor and privilege of this recognition and this award. This Award will help us to continue ensuring the progress of this strategy.
- Our local PAHO Office: Dr. Kathleen Israel, our Representative during those implementing years and then more recently Dr. Beverley Barnett.
- Dr. Rosalinda Hernandez, our IMAI focal point at PAHO
- Dr. Gumti Krishendat, previous Director of Chronic Disease Unit, who was instrumental in ensuring the continued training and roll out.
- Nurse Tucker who continues the work of supervision and training and all the Directors of the Ministry who worked to implement IMAI.
- Most of all, appreciation goes out to all the health care workers of Guyana who continue to use this strategy for our Guyanese brothers and sisters throughout our country.
- Last but not least to all the staff from PAHO and PAHEF who worked with us through these weeks to get us here and show us such warmth and appreciation.

Thank you so very much.