



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

53rd DIRECTING COUNCIL

66th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

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**OPENING REMARKS BY MR. JOSÉ MIGUEL INSULZA, SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

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**29 September 2014
Washington, D.C.**

**53rd Directing Council of PAHO
66th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Ms. Carina Vance Mafla, President of the Directing Council of the
Pan American Health Organization,
Dr. Carissa Etienne, Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau,
Dr. Sylvia Mathews Burwell, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services,
Ministers of Health of the Member States,
Delegates,
Dr. Anarfi Asamoah-Baah, Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization,
Mr. Ferdinando Regalia, Social Protection and Health Division Chief of the
Inter-American Development Bank,
Ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great honor for me, as Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), to participate in this opening ceremony of the 53rd Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and of the 66th Session of the Regional Committee of the World Health Organization for the Americas. On previous occasions I have described the close relationship between the OAS and PAHO, which goes far beyond our organizational links to the Inter-American system; and this is a good opportunity to reflect on that relationship. I sincerely hope that when my years as Secretary General are remembered, the strides made in integrating the agendas of our two organizations will figure prominently because, in all honesty, I am very proud of that.

Since 1902 PAHO, as the agency of the Inter-American system specializing in health, has contributed significantly to the well-being of the peoples of the Americas. In recent times this effort has been framed by the conviction that quality basic health coverage is a right for all, and expanding this coverage helps reduce poverty and is an integral part of the task of preserving democracy.

For that reason, on multiple occasions health priorities and actions have been connected and integrated with other areas of development, such as education, labor,

and the environment—all of which are priorities for the Organization of American States.

Therefore it should come as no surprise that we have worked with PAHO on such issues as worker health and safety, health education, nutrition, services for persons with disabilities, HIV/AIDS control, and human rights. We have also come together for important solidarity endeavors such as supporting the sister Republic of Haiti.

These kinds of joint activities—particularly when they bring together efforts of the organs and agencies of the Inter-American system—are in fact quite significant. They enable us to strengthen and leverage our hemispheric efforts to combat poverty, exclusion, lack of education, unemployment, shortcomings in health, limited basic services, and so many other problems we need to overcome, much better than any of us could do individually. This helps lay the foundations for sound, equitable economic growth and development with social justice.

We have recently been spearheading a specific effort to integrate our work by finding ways to work together against manifestations of the world drug problem in our hemisphere. This joint approach naturally views the problem of drug abuse as a public health phenomenon more than a matter of public safety.

Thus, within the CICAD-PAHO Joint Regional Program, which entails collaboration between the ministries of health and national drug control commissions, we are developing subregional initiatives and determining priority areas for joint activities. The Program establishes a frame of reference under which countries can develop public health policies regarding drugs. It seeks to encourage better quality of care for persons with substance abuse problems by establishing quality standards for service providers, and it includes curricula design and training materials for health professionals caring for people with drug problems.

The joint work plan shared by the OAS (through CICAD) and the Pan American Health Organization incorporates many key activities. This includes holding subregional meetings with Ministries of Health and national drug authorities in Central America and the Caribbean before the end of this year. The objective is to develop subregional initiatives and establish priority areas for joint action.

We call this the “public health approach,” and it has been adopted by consensus in our countries and Member States. As a result of the meeting with directors of the Pan American Health Organization in September of 2013, when I had the opportunity to present my Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas, interest in the drug problem was raised among the ministers of health. This was followed by the negotiation of a joint work plan which includes such specific activities as convening subregional joint meetings

of the ministers of health and national drug control commissions. The first such event—which brought the countries of Central America together under the auspices of the OAS—was held in San Salvador in June of this year.

Now we are on the threshold of another joint effort vis-à-vis the upcoming Summit of the Americas. As you know, this important event will be held in Panama in April of next year, and its theme is “Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas.”

The topic is very relevant since in order to have true prosperity, it must be accompanied by equity, which is the great challenge facing our Region. Panama has also indicated that under this topic it wishes to include several sub-topics, one of which is health, which is understandable since health is essential for reducing the high levels of inequality afflicting our Region. For that reason the active involvement of PAHO, including its membership in the Joint Summit Working Group which encompasses 11 other international organizations and was formed to guide the process of preparing for and following-up on the Summit, will be very important. We are pleased to have your active support.

I wish to conclude my remarks by recalling something I have pointed out to you before. It is that health policies are called upon to play a central role in achieving development goals and in promoting and upholding the economic, social, and cultural rights enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. And your Organization is in charge of making sure that happens.

I am certain that this task will continue to be performed to our satisfaction, so much so that the impact of PAHO’s actions on the progress made for our peoples’ health and well-being is indisputable.

Let us continue to go forward together in that endeavor. For this I once again wish you the best of success.

Thank you.
