



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

54th DIRECTING COUNCIL

67th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

Washington, D.C., USA, 28 September-2 October 2015

CD54/DIV/2
Original: Spanish

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF HONDURAS
HIS EXCELLENCY JUAN ORLANDO HERNÁNDEZ**

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF HONDURAS
HIS EXCELLENCY JUAN ORLANDO HERNÁNDEZ**

**28 September 2015
Washington, D.C.**

**54th Directing Council of PAHO
67th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Mr. President,
Honorable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dr. Etienne,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Pan American Health Organization, on behalf of my country, Honduras, for the opportunity to address to you here at PAHO's 54th Directing Council and 67th session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas.

Nine years ago, along with a group of friends from different social organizations from Honduras and other countries, we initiated what today has become the most important social platform of the last 50 years, "*Vida Mejor*," or a "Better Life."

We began with clean cook stoves; in Honduras we call these '*ecofogones*' or 'eco-stoves'. We pushed this so hard during my political campaign, that the opposition nicknamed me "JUAN STOVE."

Today the *VIDA MEJOR* platform is the most aggressive social program being promoted in Honduras, and for the most part with government resources.

A comprehensive platform, *Vida Mejor* directly addresses health problems, the need for decent housing, the economy, and the environment of the poorest and most excluded families.

For example, 66% of households in Honduras cook their food with firewood.

Hence, clean stoves, or *ecofogones*, are having a positive impact on the health of families, particularly of women and children, who spend the most time in the kitchen. They also have a positive impact on the environment, since they reduce the impact of deforestation and air pollution, and on the family budget, through savings on the cost of

firewood or time spent gathering it. The use of eco-stoves also contributes to gender equality, since women spend less time cooking and can get involved in other activities.

In the 18 months of my administration, more than 52,000 families have benefitted and we hope that before this year ends, we will be able to help more than 50,000 additional families. With the installation of eco-stoves, we have also seen how they can provide an alternative source of income for families through the sale of food, such as tortillas.

Vida Mejor is also building family gardens, which contribute to a healthy diet within the reach of all families. We have taken the tradition of the family garden and added a drip irrigation system to help face the risks of climate change. To date, we have aided 13,772 families with gardens at home, 373,860 children with gardens at their schools, and 930 communities with community gardens. Camilo Medina de Alubaren is one example.

Furthermore, *Vida Mejor* promotes the widespread use of water filters, reducing gastrointestinal illnesses.

Another important component is cement floors, which, as you know, help reduce many illnesses, such as diarrhea and related diseases. To date, 50,000 households have benefited from cement floors.

To date, 33,180 cisterns have been built for water collection and basic sanitation. For basic sanitation and a decent life, 29,000 families have benefited from the installation of latrines at their homes.

As you can see, *Vida Mejor* offers small interventions at the family level aimed at giving a sense of pride. That is why we say that small changes lead to major transformations.

But one of the components of *VIDA MEJOR* that may help the most to improve the health of millions of families that live in difficult conditions is the BETTER FAMILIES model.

This is an innovative model of self-reliance led by women, promoting nutritional food security with a learn-by-doing approach. It is a response to the clear need to create a positive attitude in the target population. It targets woman of childbearing age, as well as children under 5, based on the four pillars of nutritional food security: availability, access, consumption, and biological utilization of food.

This initiative teaches **women to love themselves**, take care of themselves, groom themselves, have good health, prepare nourishing food, plan with their partner how many children they want to have and when, care for their children starting in the

womb, nourish themselves with food that is available in the community, and get prenatal care to ensure that pregnancy and childbirth turn out well.

Nine years ago, I found out that I had high blood pressure, that I was hypertensive, and my doctor told me something very practical and simple:

“Juan Orlando, there are two things you have to do to control high blood pressure: exercise and eat healthy.”

A few months ago, we launched a program designed to encourage citizens of all ages to set aside some time during their day for physical activity and eating healthy.

This was how the “**Get Active Honduras**” program was born, which means doing exercise—such as hiking, distance running, running cross-country, in the woods, or on the beach, bike races, zumba, and aerobics. We are creating a festival of physical activity for all, including people with special capacities and older adults, regardless of age or sex. They also learn about healthy eating, since nutritionists and physicians are available to counsel and advise participants.

During our administration, we have created several recreational parks in very poor areas, with support from private companies, and it is now very common to see whole families exercising at different times of day. This not only helps our physical health, but also our mental health, and social cohesiveness, which is so important in our society.

There is another issue I do not want to leave out: Since I came to office, we have changed the processes for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies, promoting transparency and quality in purchasing. To do this, we set up a trust fund with the resources for purchasing, and procurement is handled with support from UNOPS, UNFPA, and Transparency International. We have achieved:

- 1) Efficiency and transparency in the purchase of drugs; and
- 2) The creation of a social oversight body for the management of drugs and supplies.

We have also allocated more money to the purchase of drugs; this year alone, we tripled the amount we have spent in the past.

Another achievement that I would like to highlight is the passage of the Framework Law on Social Protection, which explicitly includes aspects of the right to health, access, and universal health coverage. Implementation of this Law guarantees our population a package of services, so that all people and communities have access to comprehensive health services that are adequate, appropriate, and high quality.

I would like to close by telling you that with the *Vida Mejor* program we are already are serving more than half of the EXCLUDED population and the POOREST people in the country, caring for family health through prevention. And, in “Get Active, Honduras,” we do demonstrations throughout the country, promoting physical activity and promoting the consumption of wholesome, nourishing food. Plus, we take this opportunity to visit the natural wonders of our country, through domestic tourism. Entire families get out on Sundays to engage in healthy activity.

With regard to the creation of opportunities and the fight against poverty, we have mapped out and are following the *Vida Mejor* platform, whose capacity and effectiveness in terms of improving living conditions among the humblest population can be seen every day in Honduras. Through *Vida Mejor*, and the recently passed Framework Law on the Social Protection System, we are addressing the Sustainable Development Goals for income, education, health, quality of life, and the empowerment of families, especially women, in the creation of productive jobs. We are convinced that this is the most effective way to organize resources and programs to fight poverty.

Let’s all get active for A BETTER LIFE!

I ensure you that we will do more for the health of our people than what tons of drugs could do.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
