



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
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**WORDS OF GRATITUDE FROM DR. CARISSA F. ETIENNE,
DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU, AFTER RECEIVING
THE DECLARATION OF MEASLES ELIMINATION**

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**27 September 2016
Washington, D.C.**

**55th Directing Council of PAHO
68th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Madam President of the Directing Council,
Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis, President of the International Expert Committee for the Verification of Measles and Rubella Elimination,
Distinguished members of the International Expert Committee: Natasha Crowcroft, Isabel Pachón, Louis Cooper, Jose Ignacio Santos and José Cassio de Moraes:

Together with the Ministers of Health and immunization teams from all the countries in the Americas, as well as in the presence of WHO Director General Dr. Margaret Chan, I express our deepest gratitude for the presentation of this declaration of endemic measles virus elimination in the Americas. This declaration is a symbol of Pan Americanism and the commitment of the countries of our Region to not only set bold and ambitious public health goals, but also attain them.

We celebrate this historic day on which the scourge of measles has been defeated in our Region.

In this same room, twenty-two years ago, the Ministers of Health of the Americas celebrated polio eradication. They resolved on that very same day to eliminate measles; to continue forward toward another public health goal. We stand on their shoulders, today, on the shoulders of professionals like the D. A. Henderson and Ciro de Quadros.

I would like to especially thank all the unnamed heroes who made this dream a reality: the health workers, who day-in and day-out have vaccinated children not only in health facilities, but also in the most difficult-to-access areas of each country.

Let me also thank those who have been dedicated to completing the noble task of researching each case until interrupting the endemic transmission of this virus, even under extremely difficult conditions.

I am sincerely grateful for all of the partners that believed in this dream and supported the necessary actions to accelerate measles elimination in our countries. Among these important partners, we are accompanied today by representatives from the CDC, the Measles and Rubella Initiative - formed by the UN Foundation, American Red Cross, CDC, WHO, and UNICEF - and from the Sabin Vaccine Institute.

There is no doubt that this regional goal was thoroughly documented and verified in each country, evidenced by the conclusions of both the National Verification Commissions and by this International Expert Committee, tending to the demands of the Plan of Action that PAHO started in 2011.

That same plan was used to document and declare rubella and congenital rubella syndrome elimination last year, a moment that was widely celebrated and shared by media around the world.

The Region of the Americas is at the forefront of immunization at the global level; this imposes a great responsibility to share our experiences with other regions of the world. We have learned from our mistakes, and this has allowed us to develop and maintain elimination strategies.

Now is the moment to implement all the necessary actions to avoid the reestablishment of endemic transmission of this deadly virus: we must strengthen epidemiological surveillance systems and maintain high vaccination coverage against measles and rubella through a strong routine immunization program and high quality vaccination campaigns.

This will only be possible if within the Member States and PAHO, we sustain our commitment and leadership, as well as a wide coordination with our partners, allowing health workers to continue with their tireless efforts to improve the health of our populations.

Bye bye, measles!

Thank you very much.
