



**55th DIRECTING COUNCIL**  
**68th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS**  
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**ADDRESS BY DR. PASTOR CASTELL-FLORIT SERRATE  
UPON RECEIVING THE PAHO AWARD FOR ADMINISTRATION (2016)**

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

Madam Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and WHO Regional Director,  
Members of the Directing Council of this prestigious Organization,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I hold Cuba very close to my heart—which is pounding with the emotion of being here today—as I receive the PAHO Award for Health Administration (2016). I am truly honored and extremely grateful to all those who supported my nomination.

Receiving such an award is a highly respected distinction, as testified by the list of my illustrious predecessors, all public health professionals in the Region of the Americas, since this award was first granted in 1969.

On this, one of the most important days of my life, I would like to recall five founders of Cuba's National Health System. They too received this award in their day, in recognition of their efforts toward the creation, consolidation, and administration of revolutionary public health in Cuba. I am referring to the professors Roberto Pereda Chávez, Arnaldo Tejeiro Fernández, Oscar Mateo de Acosta Fernández, Eduardo Bernabé Ordaz Ducungé, and Francisco Rojas Ochoa.

My gratitude would be incomplete if I failed to mention my colleagues who have resolutely accompanied me on this difficult but vital journey in public health management throughout all these years. I am also extremely grateful to my parents, my family, and my wife for her unconditional support; and for the great figures in public health who initiated me and then guided me through this fascinating world, including Dr. Abelardo Ramírez Márquez and so many others who firmly believed that a better world was possible and demonstrated this by example throughout their lives.

In the theoretical and conceptual aspects of health administration, Professor Orlando Carnota Lauzán, my former mentor, played a pivotal role, guiding me toward the achievements being recognized today with this award. His teachings became part of my academic training as a public health professional, framed within the context of the social praxis of the Cuban National Health System and informed by the Cuban

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revolutionary process, which I have lived through. Cuba today has a humanistic, universal, free, equitable, collective, and internationally active health system with over 50,000 health workers, including 25,000 physicians providing services in over 67 countries worldwide.

I can now appreciate that all those sleepless nights and all that effort was not in vain. As I humbly receive this recognition, I clearly see that this is also a recognition of my generation—of those who went before us and embarked on this arduous battle for the health of our people—and of the current generation, represented by our Minister of Public Health, who runs the National Health System with intelligence, science, and conscience. For over forty-five years, I have worked with dedication, perseverance, and something verging on stubbornness, together with an amazing team in the management of health systems and services, human resources education, scientific output and research, public health sciences, intersectoral management, and the political and technological components needed to address the social determinants of health. All this has served to plant seeds that have already sprouted and which still have an incredible potential for growth.

In this regard, I believe that the lack of sustainability in good health systems, and the inability of other systems to obtain excellence, cannot be justified solely with the argument of inadequate funding. The basic question here is “what are we doing with the resources we have?” It is not a question of attaining health at any price, but rather attaining the most and best healthcare possible with the resources available to us.

If we are to shift away from the perception of health systems as a huge expense and move toward seeing them as an investment, we need to tackle many issues involving strategies, organization, processes, professional competencies, decision-making, decentralization, and the capacity for change and leadership. Otherwise, we will continue to look like big spenders, and this has to change. The purpose of health management is to endeavor to improve quality and timeliness, to develop more and better health using the least resources possible with the available instruments and technologies. It is up to us working in the field of health administration to ensure that this is understood and carried out.

The PAHO Award for Administration, bestowed on me by the oldest health organization in the world, carries with it a deep commitment to continue to work relentlessly in health management and to contribute scientific evidence to help develop and improve the health and well-being of our populations.

It is very encouraging to see how highly the Pan American Health Organization values public health administration and management, which is a science, technique, and art in need of sustained strengthening and greater awareness of its importance.

Health administration is now being treated as a priority in the education and overall preparation of public health managers. I truly believe that a crucial component in achieving universal health—as well as the public health strategies and goals being formulated all over the Region of the Americas—is how well our health managers have mastered this science.

Having been given the opportunity to express my gratitude, I had to think long and hard about what I wanted to say. I decided to focus on aspects that sum up how I feel.

Selected four words to guide me: humility, persistence, belonging, and gratitude.

Today is a remarkable day. I want to hold on to this memory. I have experienced many of life's ups and downs, hardships and challenges. But I have come through, as a genuine product of the Cuban revolution, enjoying and sharing the happiness I feel and doing so with the same spirit of humility, persistence, belonging, and gratitude that I started out with all those years ago in my modest home, sharing my childhood and teenage dreams with my parents and brothers and sisters, then later with my companions at school, my teachers, my colleagues, my own family, my people, and the Region of the Americas.

Thank you very much.

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