



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
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REMARKS BY DR. MERCELINE DAHL-REGIS
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERT COMMITTEE FOR THE VERIFICATION OF
MEASLES AND RUBELLA ELIMINATION

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**27 September 2016
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**55th Directing Council of PAHO
68th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Madam President,
Madam Director of Pan American Health Organization,
Director-General of World Health Organization,
Distinguished Ministers of Health,
Heads of Delegations,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors,
Colleague members of the International Experts Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen:

Today's occasion marks a significant public health milestone in the lives of the diverse communities across the Americas. We are here to report on and celebrate the success of the interruption of measles transmission in our hemisphere. Yes, indeed, in the countries of the Americas.

This is an historic event, a major achievement, made possible with shared vision, collaborative effort, skilled leadership in public health, and dedicated health workers from large urban centers to small villages everywhere in our region. Undergirded by the political commitment to get the job done and with solidarity that no country in the Americas Region will be left behind, what appeared to be impossible a decade ago is now a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Successes in eliminating the transmission of measles, and controlling vaccine preventable diseases are due in no small measure to maintaining high immunization coverage. This cannot be achieved without the involvement of the private and public sectors; our national programs of expanded immunization; the hard work and commitment of our public health care workers in the field; the contribution of our laboratory partners; and the gallant effort of the National commissions that were appointed by our governments to verify the interruption of transmission of these diseases. These are all best practices to be shared with other regions of the world.

The resolution CSP24.R16 (1994) addressed the regional goal of measles elimination and the resolution CD44.R1 (2003) addressed the regional goals of rubella and CRS elimination, for the three vaccine preventable diseases.

We agreed that no country in the Americas would be left behind.

As you remember, by 2002, the last endemic measles case was reported in the Americas. In 2007, the Americas embarked the process of documenting measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome elimination. To this end, the countries were urged to establish their national verification commissions, the International Expert Committee (IEC) was formed, and we have been together since that time.

The IEC was pleased to receive the independent reports signed by the respective National Verification Commission chairs between 2011 and 2014, and for second time, in 2016.

The task of verification was not without its challenges. Countries were able to overcome a number of geopolitical difficulties, including obtaining high coverage for mobile populations, migrants, cross border issues, limited and sometimes no access to deprived areas, and the presence of areas with conflict situations. Very large countries were able to manage the particular challenge of communication between federal and state governments and municipalities.

We can all agree that Immunization is for everyone and we know that these viruses do not carry visas, passports, nor do they discriminate among peoples based on class, race, gender or social status or physical barriers. Many have risked their lives and continue to risk their lives to save the lives of others, including the unborn.

Successes were achieved by the identification of countries that had unimmunized populations and outbreaks.

We acknowledge the response to outbreaks and the corrective measures taken. This occurred in Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, the United States and Venezuela among others with tremendous successes. In-country consultations with teams from PAHO and IEC members made a difference. Countries readily received advice and acted on it.

Distinguished delegates:

There would be no success story for the Americas here today without the PAHO Revolving Fund for Vaccine Procurement, which is one of the best examples of Pan Americanism. It was also demonstrated in many other different forms of support we

received: from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the USA; the Measles and Rubella Initiative; the Public Health Agency of Canada and the International Pediatric Society, among others, who provided technical and human resources when needed.

Today, you exemplify what true Pan Americanism is: without the high political commitment from the governments of the Americas you are representing here today, we would not have this achievement. Our leaders know that immunization remains the greatest public health investment of all time.

There are many champions; some are in our midst and others are not here: Sir George Alleyne, Dr. Mirta Roses, Dr. Ciro De Quadros, Dr. Jon Andrus, Dr. Gina Tambini, Dr. Carlos Castillo, Dr. Beryl Irons, Mr. Peter Carrasco. The IEC members are champions too and I wish them to know that their good work would receive their just reward from above.

On behalf of each IEC member, I wish to express heartfelt thanks to the many Governments and institutions that have allowed the effort to continue. On a personal note, a heartfelt thank you to the government of the Bahamas and especially Dr. Perry Gomez who is present here today. The support of our families and loved ones made our schedules possible and we say thank you.

Conclusion

The journey is not finished yet and the national and regional efforts must continue. We must now maintain the elimination of measles and rubella transmission in the Americas and appeal for global eradication of measles. To the Director of PAHO and the Director General: this is your legacy. To the Ministers of Health assembled here today: your colleagues, your children, your grandchildren and generations to come will be able to see you in that photograph on this day when we have declared the Americas free of endemic measles transmission.

Please madam chair, as president of the Directing Council, I ask your permission to invite the Director of the Pan American Health Organization, Dr. Carissa Etienne, to receive the formal declaration of the Americas as free of measles, on behalf of all Ministers of Health of the Americas, as well as the Director of the World Health Organization, Dr. Margaret Chan and you, as the President of this Directing Council.
