



29TH PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE
69TH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS
DIRECTOR'S WELCOME REMARKS

PRESIDENT OF THE 28TH PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE, HONORABLE MR. NICKOLAS STEELE, MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY OF GRENADA
HONORABLE MINISTERS AND SECRETARIES OF HEALTH OF PAHO-WHO MEMBER STATES

DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, HONORABLE DR. TEDROS ADHANOM

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER STATE DELEGATES

EMINENT MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

REPRESENTATIVES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN FORMAL RELATIONS WITH THE PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

FELLOW PAHO AND WHO COLLEAGUES

HONORED GUESTS

ESTEEMED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

A very Good Morning to you all

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with immense pleasure that I stand here today to extend to you all a very warm welcome to the house of health in the Americas as we convene this our Twenty-Ninth Pan American Sanitary Conference and the 69th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas.

On behalf of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and our Member States, I am especially delighted to welcome our new Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, who was elected to that prestigious office in May 2017. I am also very pleased to welcome those new Secretaries and Ministers of Health, who assumed responsibility for their national health portfolios, since we last met here in September 2016.

Ladies and Gentlemen....

On a more somber note, I would like to take this opportunity to publically extend to the Governments and peoples of- Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Cuba, the British Virgin Islands, the US Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, French and Dutch Saint Martin, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, the United States of America and my own country, Dominica-

our sincerest and heartfelt condolences on the occasion of the deaths and injuries, the utter devastation and destruction, the extensive dislocation and the psychological trauma resulting from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose and Maria.

To the Government and people of Mexico, we extend our deepest commiserations regarding the tremendous loss of lives and the extensive damage resulting from two powerful earthquakes that struck your country on the 8th and 19th of September 2017, respectively, as well as the additional impacts produced by Hurricane Katia.

We stand in empathy with you and in solidarity, we commit to working with you all to ensure the speedy re-establishment and effective functioning of your health systems.

The economic losses resulting from these disasters including their direct physical impacts will be astronomical. Reconstruction will be long and difficult for all affected, but particularly so, for the Small Island Developing States, for the poor and for persons living under conditions of vulnerability.

Although we will never be able to quantify and monetize the indirect and intangible costs resulting from these disasters, such as, for example- their impact on the environment and on human health and well-being, especially the mental and psychological health of persons residing in affected areas- we cannot assume that these monster events occurring sequentially over a very short period of time, will not have left indelible scars both on our physical landscapes and our mental psyche. Nonetheless, we must hope and pray that all of our people will, once again, be proven resilient and find within themselves that irrepressible spirit to recover and to rebuild.

Ladies and Gentleman, the 2017 Global Risks Report produced by the World Economic Forum indicates that today our world is facing a number of key challenges. Two of these challenges are in the economic category, namely, rising income and wealth disparity.

Globally, although economic inequalities between countries has decreased at an accelerated pace over the past thirty years, the data within many countries tell a different story. Latin America and the Caribbean has achieved considerable success in reducing extreme poverty over the last decade and although income inequality has fallen in recent years, it remains the most unequal region in the world.

In 2014, the richest 10 percent of people in Latin America had amassed 71 percent of the region's wealth.

As we direct our attention to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and develop multi-sectoral plans of action, we must collectively recognize the need for a greater focus on human well-being and in ensuring that economic growth delivers progress for all. Our policy choices must be informed by an assessment of their impacts on populations living in conditions of vulnerability and on the different dimensions of well-being as well as their distributional consequences. Future economic growth models can no longer be exclusively driven by the per capita Gross Domestic Product, but must rather emphasize policies for improving people's lives, where income is one crucial enabling element, among others that matter to people, including health, environment, employment and work, education and life satisfaction.

Another key challenge is to protect and strengthen our systems of global cooperation, as signs of deteriorating commitments are becoming more noticeable. We are all very much aware that global health security is enabled by binding legal agreements such as the International Health Regulations -2005 [IHR-2005].

The purpose and scope of the IHR [2005], which involves 196 countries across the globe, is to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade. The IHR serves to collectively protect our populations from the adverse impacts of acute emerging and-or re-emerging infectious diseases as well as protecting international trade and travel, under the oversight and guidance of the World Health Organization. The recent Ebola epidemic in West Africa and the 2016-2017 emergence of the Zika virus epidemic in the Americas have clearly demonstrated and underscored the need for global co-operation in disease preparedness, response, research, knowledge sharing and the strengthening of our national health systems.

Similarly, without the solidarity and sustained political commitment of our Member States in the Region of the Americas, we would not have been successful in eradicating smallpox and in eliminating poliomyelitis, rubella, congenital rubella syndrome and measles from this continent. Under the technical guidance of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Member States have maintained and sustained strong national surveillance systems that are ever watchful for importations of these diseases together with effective rapid-response teams to suppress the potential spread of any such importations.

The individual country and collective regional commitments and investments in relation to the elimination of diseases preventable by vaccination are a testament to Pan American solidarity.

While we all have our eyes set on the Polio End Game to achieve global poliomyelitis eradication, today we are challenged by a global shortage of inactivated poliomyelitis vaccine [IPV], the recommended antigen formulation to be used in this end game strategy. We do hope that this current challenge would not jeopardize our goal of achieving global eradication of poliomyelitis. However, given the complex dynamics of current global vaccine markets, we must ask if one day we may find ourselves without an essential life-saving vaccine to protect our populations if a vaccine manufacturer determines that it is no longer within their profit interests to manufacture a vaccine.

Similarly, in our quest to reduce the prevalence and adverse impacts of antimicrobial resistance we must cooperate globally, regionally and nationally across the spheres of human and veterinary medicine, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries.

Antimicrobial resistance not only increases the cost of health care for lengthier hospital stays and more intensive care for patients with drug resistant infections, but it also puts at risks the gains of the Millennium Development Goals and endangers achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Under the rubric of *One Health*, the World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health [OIE] must jointly advocate for global cooperation to reduce the use of antimicrobials, whether therapeutically or for growth promotion, in animals being raised commercially for food. We in health must continue to collaborate with WHO in its fight to prevent and control the production and distribution of substandard, spurious, falsely-labelled, falsified or counterfeit antimicrobials. Together, we must also be strong proponents and advocates for active research and development of new antibiotics. Without new drugs to combat the ever-increasing number of drug resistant pathogens, society will soon run out of options for the efficacious treatment of infections.

One last key challenge to which I must refer is that cluster of environmentally related risks, which include extreme weather events, the failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as water crises. I will not deliberate further on this point as we have before us indisputable indications of changes in climatic patterns and conditions as evidenced by the occurrence of more tropical storms, of greater intensity and frequency. We must all cooperate to reduce those factors that are contributing to climate change and to mitigate its health effects as we work collectively to achieve Goals 13, 14 and 15 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the ultimate protection of our planet.

Given the heightened and passionate discussions currently evolving around the monster disasters that have occurred over the past three weeks, it is abundantly clear that from a climate change perspective urgent attention must be given to the implementation and enforcement of adaptation policies such as appropriate land use, a revision of building codes, where appropriate, retrofitting of buildings to improved hazard standards including the construction of hurricane resistant housing, coastal and shoreline defense mechanisms, water management and new approaches to sustainable development.

In addition, as has been discussed over and over again from Texas and Florida to Dominica and everywhere else in between, we must consider what should be done differently and in advance of these storms in order to better to manage or overcome the negative impacts resulting from interruptions in communications, electricity and availability of drinking water.

Finally, I would like to draw to your attention the fact that global warming could potentially result in an expansion of the geographic ranges of some vectors, with the concurrent spread of certain diseases into areas in which they did not previously exist.

Ladies and Gentlemen....

The Pan American Sanitary Bureau together with its Member States has made significant advancements in improving the health and well-being of the peoples of the Americas, of which we can all be justifiably proud. While you will learn more about these notable developments from my quinquennial report, which will be presented later today, I would like to briefly capture for you some of our achievements:-

- As a region progress has been made in increasing universal access to health and universal health coverage; in strengthening national health systems and in increasing health system financing.

- Our infectious disease elimination agenda including that for vaccine-preventable and neglected tropical diseases have been highly successful though yet not complete on all fronts.
- We are beginning to note some tangible successes in addressing the burden and impact of the chronic non-communicable diseases and their risk factors through the greater utilization of regulatory mechanisms supported by legal frameworks.
- We have been able to mount an effective response to emergencies and disasters within 24 hours, given our strengthened technical structures, our enhanced human resource capacities and the application of best practices honed from our continuous assessment of the lessons learned over the past forty years.
- Health- in- All Policies as well as whole- of- government and whole- of- society approaches are being more readily embraced in an effort to reduce inequities and increase access to the social determinants of health.

- Institutionally, we have been able to improve the management of our information systems through the implementation of the PASB Management Information System [PMIS]; achieve enhanced gender parity in our workforce; develop an integrated program budget based on bottom-up planning and programmatic prioritization in close collaboration with countries; and increase transparency and accountability through joint performance assessments with our Member States.

In spite of our many joint achievements, there remain some unfinished agenda items such as, for example, reaching the maternal mortality target established by the Millennium Development Goals, even as we ready ourselves to face those new challenges that will emerge on a daily basis.

This 29th Pan American Sanitary Conference has an ambitious agenda before it, as we will traverse a wide range of procedural, constitutional, programmatic policy, informational, and administrative and financial matters over the course of this week. We will also use the opportunity afforded by this PASC to host an early observance of our 115th birthday, which will be celebrated in December 2017.

We will also unveil and launch our 2017 flagship publication entitled, *Health in the Americas Plus*, together with its new innovative information platform. In addition, you will have the opportunity to participate in a number of side events during which some critical topics such as Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas, Climate Change, the Health of Migrants and Regulatory Policies and Healthy Eating, will be addressed by Member States.

It is my sincere hope that we will have a very successful and productive week under your expert guidance and visionary leadership as we collectively seek to chart a unified course for achieving progress towards the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Health Agenda. We recognize that we will encounter rough seas as we sail, but we will continue to constantly scan the horizon, examining a wide variety of information in order to identify potential threats, risks, emerging issues and opportunities, and as a consequence, allow for greater preparedness and the incorporation of mitigation actions into our policy making processes.

I have every confidence that together we will safely and successfully reach our designated port of call without having left anyone behind, as we would be sailing under the flag of Pan American solidarity, underpinned by our core values of equity, excellence, respect and integrity.

I thank you.

Once again, I extend to you all a very warm welcome.

DR. CARISSA ETIENNE

26 SEPTEMBER 2017