



Address by the Director of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO)

## **Dr. Carissa F. Etienne**

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*Opening session of the 83rd General Session of the World Assembly of Delegates of the  
World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)*

Honorable President of the World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE, Dr. Karin Schwabenbauer  
Honorable Director General of the OIE, Dr. Bernard Vallat  
Distinguished Delegates of the 180 OIE Member Countries  
Excellences, honorable ministers  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank the Director General for the invitation to address this very influential forum of Member States.

The Pan American Health Organization has long recognized the importance of the animal health sector to the health and well-being of the people of the Americas. Human and animal health share many common challenges as well as many common opportunities.

One of the greatest challenges facing human health and well-being is—and has always been—food security. Access to an adequate, consistent diet and nutrition is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it is included in the first Millennium Development Goal as well as in the proposed Sustainable Development Goals. But producing enough food is not the sole challenge. As we enter the post-2015 era, it is critical that efforts to ensure food security also promote more sustainable forms of agriculture and animal husbandry.

Part of this challenge is the growing threat of antibiotic resistance, which has become a global concern for animal health and production as well as public health. This is an urgent problem that our sectors must address together, collaborating on surveillance and risk reduction as part of a coordinated response at the global, regional and national levels. This topic was discussed at length at the World Health Assembly a few days ago. Members considered a plan of action to address AMR.

An integral aspect of food security is, of course, food safety. The Pan American Health Organization and WHO this year dedicated World Health Day to this issue, urging everyone—from producers to consumers—to do their part to ensure that food stays safe “from farm to plate.”

During the last decades, emerging zoonotic diseases have become a central concern for global health security; the Ebola outbreak is the most recent—and a particularly stark—example. Other zoonotic diseases that present a global challenge include influenza viruses, Hanta viruses, West Nile fever, and MERS coronavirus. These diseases require rapid response and teamwork between physicians, veterinarians and biologists as well as coordination at all level sof government and internationally. It was SARS—an emerging zoonotic disease—that shaped the new International Health Regulations of 2005. Today, Ebola is shaping the new world order for global health security.

We also have in common a long list of older scourges, the neglected zoonotic diseases, such as rabies, leishmaniasis, brucellosis, and anthrax. These diseases affect poor, indigenous and marginalized groups who lack access to quality health and veterinary services.

These are all challenges that the human and animal health communities face together, and they all call for cooperative and coordinated responses. They require better epidemiological surveillance and preparedness, and innovative approaches to control and prevention. This is why international organizations must lead on coordination at the intersection of animal, environmental and human health.

In the Americas, there is a longstanding tradition of such coordination. The Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center, PANAFTOSA, is one of our best examples. Last year, this World Assembly established PANAFTOSA as an OIE Collaborating Center on Veterinary Public Health. This recognition adds to the Center's long-established function as an OIE Reference Laboratory for Foot and Mouth Disease.

PANAFTOSA, which is based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has been the lead coordinator of international efforts to eradicate the foot-and-mouth virus from the Americas. For the first time since the Center was established in 1951, no cases of the virus have been reported in our region for three consecutive years. This is a historic achievement of the livestock breeders and the veterinary services of the countries of the Americas and for PANAFTOSA, as well as for PAHO and OIE as organizations.

PAHO has also progressively broadened PANAFTOSA's mandates to include other health priorities such as emerging and neglected zoonotic and foodborne diseases and food safety.

PANAFTOSA has been coordinating a regional action plan to eliminate human rabies transmitted by dogs in the Americas. Since implementation of the plan began in 1983, the number of human cases has dropped 95%, along with a 98% decline of rabies cases in dogs. However, human rabies deaths still occur in some areas.

PAHO is also promoting the One Health Policy to animal and human health. We are working to strengthen capacity in Caribbean countries, with European Union funding and in partnership with the University of West Indies, FAO and IICA.

The region of the Americas is very much on board to move forward and address our common human and animal health challenges through collaborative, cross-sector, and integrated approaches. In that regard, PAHO will host the RIMSA in 2016.

We wish to acknowledge the leadership of OIE and Dr. Bernard Vallat, a visionary world leader who has done so much for the health of "All Creatures Great and Small". Dr Vallat: on behalf of PAHO and the public health community I represent, I thank you for your contributions to the health and well-being of this planet.

As I conclude, let me reiterate that the Pan American Health Organization is fully committed to collaborating with the OIE and other international partners to strengthen the capacity of our member countries to address the challenges we face together. I am confident that this World Assembly will make courageous decisions and take effective actions to ensure a more prosperous, healthy and equitable world for the generations to come.

Thank you very much.