



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

30th PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE
74th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS
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OPENING REMARKS
BY HIS EXCELLENCY ALBERTO FERNÁNDEZ,
PRESIDENT OF ARGENTINA

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Mr. Director General of the World Health Organization,
Madam Director of the Pan American Health Organization,
Honorable Ministers of Health of the Region of the Americas,
Distinguished delegates,
Everyone:

It is an honor for our country to participate in the opening of the 30th Pan American Sanitary Conference of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO); not only because it is the first face-to-face conference since the pandemic, but because it marks the end of a year in which Minister Carla Vizzotti of Argentina chaired the PAHO Executive Committee.

I want to emphasize two lessons the pandemic has left us: the first is the importance of prioritizing health and the second is that, in any emergency or crisis, no one saves themselves alone.

Our Region is undoubtedly one of the most active in terms of cooperation, and it is particularly active in terms of health cooperation. The Region of the Americas was not only the first to declare the elimination of diseases such as smallpox, polio, rubella, congenital rubella, and measles, but also the first in the world to create an international public health organization.

This Organization, which celebrates its 120th anniversary this year, is the result of regional leadership and a commitment to public health on the part of all the countries that make up the inter-American system.

I especially want to highlight the dedication and vocation of Dr. Carissa Etienne during her ten years in office, as well as her efforts to respond collaboratively to the COVID-19 pandemic in our Region.

I should mention that during the pandemic this cooperation was threatened, which at times made it difficult to advance joint regional responses and has hindered equitable access to critical inputs such as vaccines. However, at the same time, post-pandemic recovery presents us with new possibilities for collaboration.

Only by investing in public health, from a rights-based and gender perspective, will we be able to reduce our dependence and vulnerability, and be better prepared for future global challenges.

Ministers, maternal mortality in our Region is unacceptably high. We must redouble our efforts to ensure sexual and reproductive health, as well as a comprehensive approach to mental health and problem substance use. We need to implement regional and national strategies that shift the focus from combatting diseases to acquiring resources and protecting and promoting health.

Argentina is implementing a strategic policy of comprehensive health care and pregnancy and early childhood care, and strengthening actions for the eradication of gender-based violence, as well as policies that ensure the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights.

In the area of mental health, in 2021 we launched a national plan to transform the mental health care system towards a community-based system that is integrated into the first level of care and that ensures the social inclusion of people with mental illness.

In this regard, we encourage international and regional organizations to echo these challenges by putting them at center stage in international health cooperation.

I would like to conclude by highlighting the important role of the ministers of health in our Region. Taking on a huge commitment, and with great responsibility, they have made decisions in each of the major humanitarian crises of this century.

The pandemic has been a unique opportunity to strengthen Pan-Americanism and rethink more equitable, more inclusive, more sustainable societies and a mutually supportive health system that guarantees equitable access and quality.

Thank you very much.
