



30th PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE
74th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS
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**CLOSING REMARKS BY DR. CARISSA F. ETIENNE,
DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR
OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION FOR THE AMERICAS**

* This version contains minor editorial adjustments.

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74th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

President of the 30th Pan American Sanitary Conference, Mr. Michael Pearson, Public Health Agency of Canada
Distinguished Delegates of Member States, Participating States, Associate Members, and Observer States
Distinguished Guests
Colleagues
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think you wanted to bring tears to my eyes but I dried them all up so there are none left.

I greet all of you on the closing of what has been a truly inspiring and productive week of frank discussions, transparent deliberations, and far-reaching decisions. I really thank you for the engaging manner in which you participated at this Conference.

Let me again congratulate Dr. Jarbas, and let me assure you, all of you, my full and unequivocal support will be given to the Director-elect as he prepares to take the mantle of office as PAHO's eleventh Director in February 2023.

Our in-person gathering this week has been an important milestone as we turn the corner on what has been the devastating COVID-19 pandemic and pursue a path towards recovery and reconstruction. I do hope that we have now broken the cycle of mandatory, pandemic-induced, virtual meetings.

This being my last Conference as Director of PAHO I am especially grateful for the formal and informal opportunities that we had to be together this week. When the Directing Council convenes in 2023, delegations will once again be able to enjoy the comfort and convenience of modernized and enhanced conference facilities at PAHO's Headquarters on 23rd Street NW. And thank you for your patience and your endurance for not being at your home for this Conference

Permit me to take this opportunity to extend to the peoples of Cuba and USA our deepest condolences for the loss of lives and the tremendous destruction of property, including health facilities, wrought by Hurricane Ian. Our prayers and thoughts are with you

This week we discussed and adopted many important policy decisions, among them resolutions to accelerate the Region's post-pandemic recovery, to recommit to addressing the social determinants of health, and to elevate the mental health and substance abuse crisis as a regional priority that must be addressed.

I heard renewed commitments to genuinely address cross-cutting issues, to close equity gaps, to remove barriers to health for people living in situations of vulnerability, to take those actions necessary for delivering integrated care, and to apply inter-sectoral approaches for improved health outcomes.

Your renewed calls for regional solidarity and recommitment to the values of Pan Americanism—equity, solidarity, and fairness—were explicit and, I dare say, unambiguous.

Your acknowledgement that the Region’s health workforce had borne the brunt of the COVID-19 fight was further amplified by appeals for refreshed and concerted efforts to develop, retain, and reward health workers, especially at the first levels of care.

I do appreciate your emphasis for the Bureau’s continued prudent management of resources, your calls for pragmatic solutions to problems, and for the payment of quota contributions and reducing arrears.

Allow me to reiterate that the PAHO Secretariat needs your assessed contributions.

Thanks for including the important and timely agenda item on maintaining the Region of the Americas Free of Polio.

Thank you also for acknowledging the 10-year track record of unqualified audits during my tenure as Director. I have indeed worked hard to firmly embed accountability, transparency, ethics, and rigorous management of the Organization’s resources in the culture and practices of the Secretariat.

Ladies and Gentlemen—we have lived through the toughest of times, but there are yet formidable challenges ahead.

If we ever doubted it, the pandemic has demonstrated yet again that the creation of PAHO some 120 years ago was an act of incredible foresight. Each successive generation has reinforced and added building blocks for achieving health for all, drawing on past lessons and expanding possibilities through new knowledge, better data, health innovations, new technologies, and an undaunted human spirit to do more and to do better.

Who knew in 2017 as I accepted a second term as Director of PAHO, that my greatest challenges as a leader were yet to come.

You have recognized that interactions at the human, animal, and environmental interfaces can trigger major crises and you have restated your support for the One Health comprehensive multisectoral, multi-stakeholder approach.

This week we discussed and adopted thirteen resolutions and covered several key topics.

Thank you very much for challenging each other during this Conference to do whatever is necessary to reduce inequities and improve people’s health and lives by bridging the gap between commitments and action.

Today, as I prepare to lower the curtain on my tenure as Director of PAHO and to hand over the leadership reins to my successor, I am encouraged to observe a new generation of leaders emerging across the Region. Many of you are in this room or participating virtually in this the Conference.

Your talent, youth, skills, energy, and ingenuity will without doubt be equal to the challenges ahead. You give me optimism about the future of PAHO, and health for all in the Americas

In closing, and on behalf of all of us, I would first like to record our deep appreciation to the respective Presidents of Dominica and Argentina and to the Secretary of Health for the US Department of Health and Human Services for their wise opening remarks, which set the stage and tone for the remainder of this meeting.

I would also like to convey our special thanks to Mr. President, Michael Pearson of Canada, for his skillful management of this 30th Pan American Sanitary Conference, and for his interjections of good humor. Thank you, Mr. Pearson for getting us there on time—with time to spare.

Let me also thank the President of the Executive Committee, Minister Vizzotti of Argentina, and our Rapporteur from Uruguay, who both discharged their respective functions with diligence and excellence. Let me also thank Suriname who has deputized for Minister Vizzotti.

I also wish to record our collective thanks to Deputy Director, Ms. Mary Lou Valdez, for her easy graciousness as Secretary of this Conference; to our Governing Bodies Office for their efficient planning, management, and execution of this Conference under the competent leadership of Mônica Zaccarelli Davoli (you will not have guessed that there were so many added complexities and the planning to execute this—it seemed almost seamless); to the Directors and staff of the technical and enabling departments for enduring the rigorous process to ensure good documents and presentations; to the staff of our Departments of Communications, Information Technology, and our General Services Office for their expert support and multi-faceted contributions; to other members of Executive Management for their unstinting support and guidance during this Conference, and way beyond that; to the Legal Counsel and staff for their exceptional management of the election process in accordance with the highest standards of transparency and integrity; and to all of personnel of the Secretariat, for their sterling contributions, their tireless efforts, and their magnanimous support both during this week and in the preceding preparatory period.

I wish to add my personal word of thanks to my Chief of Staff, Dr. Merle Lewis, and the hardworking rarely industrious team in the Director's Office. I am very grateful for your continued support, your love, and your care.

On behalf of all the delegates, I want to extend a whole-hearted thank-you to our talented interpreters, who make it possible to understand each other, or else we would have been in the Tower of Babel.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I assure you that I will continue to give of my very best to PAHO until Dr. Jarbas assumes the position in 2023. Thank you for your many kind words and acts of generosity to me during this Conference and throughout my tenure of ten years. We couldn't do it without the support of all our Member States. Thank you for allowing me to work alongside you.

I encourage everyone with a vision and big dreams to make the world a better place, to continue to reach up and up and up beyond your grasp, you will be surprised at what is possible.

It has been really, for me, an undisputable honor for me to serve the people of the Americas as the Director of PAHO. I feel privileged yet humbled that your trust in me has reaped good results.

I wish you au revoir, safe travels, and Godspeed as you return to your respective homes.

With profound thanks.
