



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



**50th DIRECTING COUNCIL**  
**62nd SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

*Washington, D.C., USA, 27 September -1 October 2010*

---

CD50/DIV/2  
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

**WELCOMING REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE  
PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU  
DR. MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO**

**WELCOMING REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE  
PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU  
DR. MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO**

**50th DIRECTING COUNCIL OF PAHO  
Washington, D.C., 27 September 2010**

Good morning everyone! Let me extend a cordial welcome to this, your house, which we call the home of health in the Americas. Every year when our ministers of health meet, we feel this even more, because it is filled with ideas and discussions about the current situation and future of health in the Region.

My sincere gratitude to the Minister of Paraguay, who served as President this past year. It has been a hard year for all health workers and the authorities, with the appearance of the new influenza A (H1N1) pandemic and then the suffering caused by the earthquakes that struck Haiti and Chile and the serious droughts, floods, and cold waves that affected the countries.

Greetings to the distinguished personalities on the dais who honor us with their participation and to the delegations from all the Member States, sister agencies of the United Nations and Inter-American systems, accredited NGOs, and special guests.

We are especially happy to welcome you all, since we are celebrating this joyous anniversary, the opening of the 50th Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). And special thanks to our host, the Government of the United States, the country that has served as home to PAHO for 108 years.

This anniversary is very significant in itself, but this is a very special year in the successful history of this young centenarian, PAHO, since we are commemorating monumental achievements in hemispheric and global public health. In addition to the 30th anniversary of the eradication of smallpox and the creation of the Revolving Fund for Vaccine Procurement in our Region, which we will devote time to tomorrow afternoon, we are also celebrating the 50th anniversary of the creation of PAHO's Radiology and Radioprotection Program.

This is a good time to take stock, to recognize the seminal contribution of Edward Jenner in the millennial fight against smallpox, and to study the lessons from the critical eradication program spearheaded by Dr. D. A. Henderson and his thousands of collaborators in both the Region and the world. This unprecedented accomplishment

by humanity shows what feats we can achieve when we apply new approaches and tools to problems that appear to have no solution.

This close link between the battles and achievements of the past and the challenges and actions of the present has been a constant in hemispheric action in public health. Looking back, we see that the first Directing Council of PAHO in 1947 agreed to pay homage to Dr. Oswaldo Cruz, with the Director at the time, Dr. Fred L. Soper, noting that yellow fever is a hemispheric problem that calls for international action. The need to act with hemispheric solidarity in matters related to health is reflected in the words of the President of that Council, the representative of Colombia, who said that the health of any people is not only its own patrimony but that of its neighbors and, thus, of all the peoples on earth, the then Secretary-General of the OAS, Alberto Lleras Camargo, also being a Colombian.

Beginning with the lessons and achievements of the past, today we also note the progress made in confronting the present challenges—for example, the progress in the initiative to eliminate rubella and congenital rubella syndrome in the Region. This has been the result of an effort that brings together the action of the Member States, the technical cooperation of our Organization, and the decisive support of key partners, demonstrating once again that, in the final analysis, public health is an immense social network that pools efforts, concentrates interests, and represents the longing of millions of people to achieve health for all.

Guided by these lessons, moreover, this Directing Council will learn and determine the Organization's policies on issues vital for tackling the pending challenges of the health agenda, consolidating achievements, and confronting new challenges. Some noteworthy examples are the Strategy and Plan of Action for Chagas' Disease Prevention, Control, and Care, the Plan of Action on Safe Hospitals, the Strategy and Plan of Action for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition, the strengthening of immunization programs, and the Strategy and Plan of Action for the Elimination of Mother-to-child Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis.

Our efforts notwithstanding, major obstacles still persist that must be overcome. None is greater in our Region than the enormous barrier of inequality that has historically afflicted us, the greatest inequality in the world, despite the substantial progress in development that the countries of the Hemisphere have made in the past decade. Therefore, combating

that inequality and its heavy incidence, both direct and indirect, on the enjoyment of the benefits of health is a key priority of our work.

The recent evaluation of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reveals that while we have made much progress, we still are behind or stagnating in fundamental areas. With only five years left to the deadline for achieving the MDGs, every year 9,200 women still die from complications of pregnancy, childbirth, or the puerperium; 237,000 children still die during their first year of life and another 304,000 before reaching their fifth birthday; and there are 170,000 new cases of HIV (estimates to 2008) in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Heads of State spoke last week at the Millennium Summit and reiterated their political commitments.

We must significantly intensify regional, national, and community efforts to overcome the obstacles and achieve the MDGs for all citizens of the Americas, placing special emphasis on the reduction of inequality and its adverse public health impact. We are therefore very pleased that during this Directing Council, with the OAS as host, we will be launching the Safe Motherhood in the Americas Initiative jointly with the United Nations Population Fund.

The main objective of this Initiative is to promote and protect the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health for women, mothers, and newborns through advocacy, mass communication, the sharing of knowledge, and the promotion of good practices based on lessons learned and scientific evidence. We began the year 2000 with 23,000 maternal deaths, and we have the conditions and the knowledge to achieve the goal and at the same time substantially reduce infant mortality and empower women.

As the President of the first Directing Council of PAHO wisely said, health is the patrimony of our peoples. We must devote our best efforts to preserving and building on that patrimony, while enabling all, without distinction, to enjoy its benefits. Our history is built on a firm foundation, and we can raise new landmarks on it along the path to health for all. The decisions, recommendations, and policies adopted by 50th Directing Council will be new steps toward the construction of a more just, unified, and equitable Region for all the peoples of the Americas.