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OPENING REMARKS BY MR. HÉCTOR SALAZAR SÁNCHEZ
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The current economic scenario is sending clear signs that the Region of Latin America and the Caribbean should prepare itself to continue advancing without the favorable wind that blew its way in the last decade. This less positive prospect requires all countries to make a deliberate effort to carry out actions in all sectors to move toward consolidation of current achievements, expand and intensify implementation of effective policies, and recognize and address remaining obstacles.

In this regard, the health sector is substantially helping to sustain and promote a favorable economic outlook for the second decade of the twenty-first century. There is evidence that the processes of change and the health sector reforms that Latin America has undertaken are beginning to bear fruit. For example, the Region leads the world in the upward trend in longevity. In the 1960s, life expectancy was 56 years. Today, as Latin Americans, we can aspire to live at least 17 years longer; although it is important to work very hard to make sure that this gain in longevity is accompanied by better health status and quality of life. At present, 7 out of every 10 older adults suffer from chronic disease. Also in the last two decades, Latin America and the Caribbean have brought the infant mortality rate down to the lowest level in the developing world, and at a faster pace than other regions. From 1990 to 2010, it dropped from 54 to 23 deaths per thousand live births, although there are still important gaps among countries. In 2011, Haiti and Bolivia reported under 5 mortality rates of 87 and 51 deaths per thousand births, while the rates for Colombia and Chile are 19 and 8, respectively.

Achievements such as these would not have been possible without effective public health interventions such as immunization and oral rehydration therapy, for which the Pan American Health Organization has played a key role in achieving the commitment of political, business, religious, and community sectors; in promoting the leadership of health workers and the support of the media and of civil society; and in the implementation of successful joint cooperation mechanisms, such as the Revolving Fund for vaccine procurement. Of equal importance is its catalytic role in the introduction of new vaccines, such as those for rotavirus, pneumococcus, and human papillomavirus (HPV). There is no doubt that PAHO has been in the forefront of the main advances in public health in the Americas, helping to combat disease, promote equity, and improve the quality and duration of life of its citizens.

Even though we began this decade with a healthier region, there is still a long list of pending items on the agenda, including the following:

- (1) Unacceptable levels of health inequity. National averages conceal major differences in health status among geographic regions, income levels, or indigenous or Afro-descendant populations, and even between urban and rural populations.
- (2) An increase in risk factors and in incidence rates of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are now the leading cause of disability and premature death in the Region's countries.
- (3) The persistence of neglected tropical diseases, which have become one of the factors contributing to the poverty traps affecting the most vulnerable populations.

In order to address these remaining challenges, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) will support the countries in their commitment to advance toward universal coverage of health services, promoting comprehensive strengthening of health systems, multisectoral work, the focus on social and environmental determinants of health, and promoting innovation and efficiency in the use of financial resources.

It is also essential to continue working together with PAHO to provide support to countries in their efforts to implement effective policies, providing high-quality technical assistance as well as direct financing. The Inter-American Development Bank hopes to continue leveraging PAHO's knowledge and experience and to strengthen our partnership in strategic areas, such as:

- (1) Reproductive health, nutrition, safe childbirth, and integrated management of childhood illness, through innovative public-private partnerships such as the *Salud Mesoamérica 2015* Initiative.
- (2) The Neglected Tropical Diseases Initiative, a partnership among PAHO, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Sabin Vaccine Institute, which supports projects that go beyond short-term curative measures and include long-term solutions that address the social and environmental determinants of the transmission of these diseases.
- (3) Prevention and management of non-communicable diseases in partnership with PAHO as part of the Pan American Forum for Action on NCDs.

- (4) Health technology assessment, adoption, and financing by means of close collaboration between the IDB's Network for Priority Setting and Health Benefit Plans, and PAHO's Health Technology Assessment Network of the Americas.

In our joint efforts with PAHO, we must ensure that the favorable health indicators that have been achieved so far continue multiplying beyond the year 2020. Our goal will not only be to do things well now, but also to lay the groundwork to ensure that good results are not an exception but a constant in the future, permitting the social leap forward that millions of Latin American deserve. Thank you very much.