

58th DIRECTING COUNCIL

72nd SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

Virtual Session, 28-29 September 2020

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**CLOSING REMARKS BY DR. CARISSA F. ETIENNE
DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU
AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR THE AMERICAS OF THE
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

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**29 September 2020
Washington, D.C.**

**58th Directing Council of PAHO
72nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

President of the 58th Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization,
Honorable Fernando Ruiz Gómez, Minister of Health and Social Protection of
Colombia,
Distinguished Delegates of Member States, Participating States, Associate Members,
and Observer States,
Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations in formal relations with the Pan
American Health Organization,
Representatives of the United Nations and Other Specialized Agencies,
Fellow PAHO staff,

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

It is with a sense of deep satisfaction that I bring to a close this 58th Session of the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization. We have come to the end of a highly productive and engaging two-day meeting during which we successfully navigated twenty-two agenda items and approved nine resolutions. On behalf of the entire Bureau and on my own behalf, I wish to extend my sincerest thanks and heartfelt appreciation to you all for your individual and collective contributions to ensuring that we successfully completed the required tasks as defined by this agenda.

When you, our Member States, provide critical analyses of our proposals and evidence-based guidance, and direction to the Bureau with the level of dedication and thoroughness that you displayed, you are ensuring both the continued quality and the relevance of PAHO's technical cooperation programs both now and well into the future.

I was heartened to hear that those fundamental principles of saving lives, improving the health and well-being of our populations and enhancing the health security of Member States and of our Region- that were the impetus for the formation of PAHO 118 years ago —are still highly relevant and applicable in this technologically-advanced twenty first century, and as we grapple with this COVID-19 pandemic.

The rich discussions regarding the responses of Member States as well as the Bureau to the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated collective leadership, solidarity and determination; identified gaps which can be transformed into opportunities such as reducing inequities in health and improving access to the social determinants of health, reinvigorating our efforts in the fight against the NCDs, advancing progress on universal health with an emphasis on the first level of care, investing in building resilient health systems, and working assiduously to reduce the burden and health impacts of climate change, to name a few.

To have survived well for over a century speaks to resilience and adaptive innovations not only in our technical cooperation but also in our governance and in our financial and risk management. Clearly, changes and adaptive transformation were essential for keeping abreast with new developments in a rapidly evolving and highly interconnected world, without compromising or diminishing our fundamental values and guiding principles. I would like to reiterate my personal commitment as well as that of the Executive Management Team to continue to purposefully build transparency, accountability and risk management across all of PAHO's operations, in order to survive and thrive during this century. I take the opportunity, again, to congratulate Member States on their efforts around discussions to strengthen Member State oversight, including reinforcing risk management practices with the approval of PAHO Governance Reform.

I greatly appreciate the expressions of commitment that we heard and once again I wish to record my sincerest thanks to all Member States that have fully paid their assessed contributions. To those with outstanding assessed contributions, your early remittances are vital and critically needed at this disastrous moment. We cannot allow the Organization to be constrained in its ability to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the other high priority public health programs because of lack of funding, that was already committed when you approved the budget.

In closing and on behalf of all of us, I would like to convey our special thanks and deep appreciation to our President- Honorable Fernando Ruiz Gomez, Minister of Health and Social Protection of Colombia- for his steady hand and skillful management of this 58th Directing Council. I would also like to express our sincerest gratitude to the Minister of Health of Barbados, the President of the Executive Committee, as well as to our Rapporteur, who discharged their respective functions with diligence and excellence.

I also wish to record our genuine and collective thanks to our own Deputy Director, Ms. Mary Lou Valdez, for her dedicated and effortlessly gracious work as Secretary of this Directing Council; to our Governing Bodies Office for their efficient planning, management and execution of all matters related to this our first virtual Directing Council meeting; to the staff of our Departments of Communications and Information Technology

for all of their dynamic support with enabling effective and uninterrupted connectivity among the nearly 400 participants who had been connected to this virtual meeting; and to all of our staff at the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, for their tireless efforts, sterling contributions and magnanimous support, both during and prior to this week's meeting. Finally, on behalf of all of the delegates, I would like to extend a whole-hearted thank-you to our talented interpreters, without whom we would not have been able to conduct our work in an efficient and seamless manner.

Ladies and gentlemen, once again, I congratulate and thank you all for a job well-done and I do look forward to your continued unstinting support, active engagement and unwavering solidarity with the Pan American Sanitary Bureau as we continue to work to save lives and improve the health and well-being of all peoples, while fighting this monumental battle against this miniscule COVID-19 virus.

Thank you all very much and goodbye.

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