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## WEEKLY PRESS BRIEFING ON COVID-19 DIRECTOR'S REMARKS—7 JULY 2021

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Good morning and welcome to our press briefing. Thank you for joining us today.

Before we start our briefing today, I have to acknowledge the event that unfolded this morning in Haiti leading to the untimely death of President Moïse Jovenel. PAHO wishes to extend its condolences to his family. We also want to express solidarity with the Haitian people in these uncertain times and to reiterate our commitment to advance the country's health and development.

Our organization has a long history of working in Haiti, hand-in-hand with local authorities, health professionals and communities through our country office in Port-au-Prince. We continue to stand with them now and will redouble our efforts.

One of PAHO's top priorities over the past few weeks has been to support Haiti to start vaccinations and to control transmission of COVID-19. We will continue working towards this goal with global and local partners. I am hopeful that the arrival of vaccines in the country can start to turn the tide of the pandemic and bring some relief to the Haitian people during these very difficult times.

This past week, we've had 1.1 million new cases in the Americas, a small decline in relation to the previous week. And while mortality has also been reduced in this period, our Region is still reporting over half of the deaths registered globally.

This is a clear sign that the toll of the pandemic in the Americas continues to devastate families and communities, even as parts of our Region are experiencing some relief.

In North America, while the overall trends are declining, there are areas in which transmission is still rising, such as Baja California del Sur in Mexico and Yukon Province in Canada.

In Central America, there is a rise in overall cases in Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama, as well as in some areas of Guatemala.

In South America, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador continue to report a high number of new cases. While incidence has been reduced in Peru and Bolivia. It's been encouraging to see that all four countries of the Southern Cone registering less cases over the past two weeks.

In the Caribbean, Cuba is reporting the highest number of new cases per week since the beginning of the pandemic, and Trinidad and Tobago is facing increased mortality due to COVID-19

The diversity and inequity of our Region continues to be reflected not only in the trends of the pandemic, but also on how countries are able to access vaccines.

There is progress in vaccinations in the Americas, but, alas, not for all.

One in four people in our Region have been fully immunized and over 600 million doses have been administered in the Americas. However, over half of these doses have been applied in just one country, the United States.

We must celebrate that a nation that has been so heavily impacted by the pandemic was able to turn the tide, but we can't close our eyes to the stark inequities on vaccine access.

Several other countries have done a remarkable job in vaccinating their people, like Chile and Uruguay who have around 50% of their population fully immunized and Canada has covered over 30%.

But for every success there are several countries that have been unable to reach even the most vulnerable in their population. Millions of people in Latin America and the Caribbean still don't know when they will have a chance to be immunized.

Haiti, for instance, has yet to start vaccinations. Jamaica is also struggling to access enough vaccines to cover their high priority groups.

Some countries in South and Central America, where the pandemic has hit particularly hard, have not yet been able to access enough vaccines to fully vaccinate 3% of their populations.

The 24 million doses of COVAX deployed in the Region so far have been quickly put to use, and countries are eager for the additional allocations to ship as soon as supplies are available.

Our countries know how to deploy vaccines and are ready. But they need more doses, and they need them now.

That's why PAHO has urged nations with enough vaccines to share them with countries in the Americas that are still struggling, and that call is starting to resonate.

This week, El Salvador welcomed 1.5 million new vaccine doses from the U.S. government through the COVAX facility as part of the pledge to share at least 20 million doses to our Region.

Others are receiving additional donations of doses bilaterally. Bolivia is due to receive just over 1 million doses this week, and other donations are being prepared.

PAHO is leading the logistics for the delivery of the COVAX doses. And we've been working with the U.S. government, the COVAX Facility and recipient countries to make sure that all requirements are met, and that vaccines can quickly and safely arrive at their destinations.

While we applaud the U.S. Government, we also applaud Mexico's donations to several countries in Central America and Jamaica. Regional solidarity will help pave our way out of this pandemic.

In fact, dose donations are helping COVAX substantially expand the availability of vaccines in the next round, with some 60 million doses coming from the United States and over 11 million from Japan, contributing to the expected allocation of some 143 million doses by COVAX.

While we must rely on donations in the short-term, we are already planning for a future scenario in which more supply will be available. PAHO is mapping the demand deficit from our Member States to determine how the Revolving Fund can support countries to meet their future goals with COVID vaccines and other supplies, such as syringes and cold chain equipment.

We need to reduce inequality in vaccine access.

Our job won't be done until we have reached every eligible person, in every country, regardless of where they live, their ethnicity or their income.

We must be guided by evidence and equity as we deploy these vaccines, so I wish to remind you of a few things:

- It's not yet time to roll out boosters, when millions have yet to receive one dose – one two-shot and one-shot regimens have proven effective long after they're administered and sticking to them will allow us to protect more people.
- We should ensure that those at greater risk, like health professionals and the elderly are protected everywhere before rolling out limited doses to healthy children.
- Vulnerable populations, such as migrants and indigenous groups, should be prioritized with programs that take their needs and their culture into account.

COVID-19 has taught us that when some are left behind, all of us are at greater risk.

The vaccines that we have at hand work remarkably well and will help us overcome the pandemic. But only if we take this opportunity to address the challenges that have long held us back, especially the pervasive inequality in access to health.

Fair and broad vaccine access must be the first step in this process.