



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

59th DIRECTING COUNCIL

73rd SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

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**OPENING REMARKS BY
HON. DR. TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

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**59th Directing Council of PAHO
73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Honourable Dr Fernando Ruiz Gómez of Colombia, President of the Directing Council,
Dr Carissa Etienne, Regional Director for the Americas,
Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends.

Good morning. I'm pleased to be able to join you from Kabul, Afghanistan.

I deeply regret that for the second year, we are not able to meet in person. But I hope that we will be meeting next year in person.

Whether we can or not is up to us. It's in our hands – we have all the tools to stop transmission and save lives: effective public health and social measures; rapid, accurate tests; life-saving oxygen; and vaccines.

WHO's global targets are to support every country to vaccinate at least 10 percent of its population by the end of this month, 40 percent by the end of the year, and 70 percent of the world's population by the middle of next year.

I'm pleased that in the Americas, almost 90% of Member States have now reached the 10% target, but less than one third of countries have reached the 40% target.

WHO and PAHO will continue to support you through COVAX to increase the availability of vaccines.

Even as we work to end the pandemic, we must learn the lessons it is teaching us, and your agenda this week reflects many of those lessons, including the need to increase local production;

the importance of a One Health approach;

the power of immunization;

the importance of resilient health systems, and more.

As you know, there have been several reports and reviews of the global response to the pandemic, including the report of the G20 High-Level Panel.

As we have studied them, we see four critical areas for action.

First, better global governance.

There are several proposals for new governance mechanisms. It's vital that any such mechanisms are inclusive, equitable and accountable.

I believe a legally binding international instrument on pandemic preparedness and response will provide a much-needed overarching framework for global health security, setting the rules of the game, and enhancing solidarity among nations.

Second, more and better financing for national and global preparedness and response.

Crucially, any new financing facilities must be built using existing financial institutions, rather than creating new ones that further fragment the global health architecture.

Third, better systems and tools, across the One Health spectrum.

Already, WHO has taken steps to start building some of those tools.

Earlier this month we opened the WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence in Berlin, and several other initiatives are in development.

And fourth, a strengthened, empowered and sustainably financed WHO at the centre of the global health architecture.

In Kabul today I have met with representatives of the Taliban administration, to discuss how WHO will continue to work to support the health of Afghanistan's people.

Earlier this week I also had the opportunity to visit Lebanon, to understand more about the challenges that country is facing, and how WHO is supporting the health system.

Both of these situations remind me of why the world needs WHO and why these countries need support. Both situations are dire, their health systems are collapsing, and people have started dying because of lack of access to essential medicines.

With 194 Member States and 152 country offices, WHO has a unique global mandate, unique expertise, unique global reach and unique global legitimacy.

But over several decades, it has been progressively weakened by a debilitating imbalance between assessed and voluntary, earmarked contributions that distort our budget and constrain our ability to deliver what our Member States expect of us.

Redressing this imbalance is critical if WHO is to be the independent and authoritative institution the world needs it to be.

I am pleased that this week you will consider the report of the Group on Sustainable Financing, and we look forward to your feedback.

Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

I leave you with four concrete requests.

First, we seek your commitment to stay the course with a comprehensive, risk-based approach to prevent transmission and save lives.

Second, we seek your support for achieving our global vaccination targets, in the Americas and around the world.

Third, we seek your support for the development and adoption of a legally binding international agreement on pandemic preparedness and response.

And fourth, we seek your support for a stronger WHO by supporting initiatives that strengthen its mandate, and by committing to a historic reversal of the current imbalance between assessed and voluntary contributions.

Excellencies,

Thank you all once again for your hard work and support for WHO at this very critical time.

And we look forward to your continued support as we work together to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable.

And I would like also to pass to all of you greetings from WHO staff here in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Thank you so much.

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