



**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

Virtual Session, 20-24 September 2021

CD59/DIV/3
Original: Spanish

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE HON. MR. SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA,
PRESIDENT OF CHILE**

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I thank the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for this invitation to share with you Chile's experience in managing, combating, and controlling the coronavirus.

Only a year and a half ago, the world was facing a virus that was unknown to us. We did not know how it was transmitted and we had no remedies, treatments, or vaccines for it. However, in less than 10 months, science was able to find answers to contain the spread of the pandemic. But while science rose to the challenge, politics failed to fulfil its mission. Because if States had shared information, coordination, and efforts from the onset of this pandemic and if they had taken measures with the same speed and conviction as the scientific community has done, the situation would undoubtedly be much better today. That is why I greatly value this space in which countries can dialogue, share experiences, and collaborate in order to better face this health crisis.

Chile was early in preparing itself to face the pandemic. On Thursday, 2 January 2020, we held our first working meeting to design an emergency action plan to tackle the coronavirus crisis. The plan was based on integrating the private and public health sectors to strengthen their coordination and capacity, especially with respect to hospitals. In February 2020, we arranged the early procurement of more than 3,200 invasive mechanical ventilators, which allowed us to triple the ICU beds in the health system, with the corresponding medical equipment, ventilators, and technologies.

We also strengthened the capacity for testing, contact tracing, and isolation, generating 28 times the capacity to do PCR tests, hiring more than 10,000 contact tracers, and ensuring more than 10,000 beds in health residences. Thanks to these decisions and actions, the health system in Chile never collapsed. Thank God it was not necessary to face the dramatic dilemma of the last bed and we were always able to provide the medical care that the sick needed in a timely manner. At the beginning of last year, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) called for countries to increase their coronavirus detection capacity with a very simple message: "Test, test, test".

In January of that year, Chile had already done its first PCR test and was strengthening its diagnostic network, quintupling its capacity to process PCR tests. Today, Chile has a public/private network of more than 180 laboratories that allow us to process about 90,000 tests every day, or more than 21 million tests since the onset of the pandemic. This makes us the Latin American country that has performed the most PCR tests per million inhabitants. We also have a network of more than 13,000 people who work on traceability throughout the country, which is key to detecting, tracing, and isolating the sick and the close contacts of confirmed cases.

To reduce transmission of the virus and isolate confirmed cases and their close contacts, we established more than 100 health residences that offer 10,000 beds for those who need them throughout our country. These residences are free and available to people who require them, covering basic services and needs. A fundamental pillar of the health strategy has been the "step-by-step" plan that we implemented in July last year, consisting of four phases, from quarantine to reopening. These are implemented according to the epidemiological conditions in each commune of our country and they regulate people's mobility and the operation and capacity of educational facilities, other establishments, and public and private places.

Moving forward or back between the different phases of this plan depends on quantifiable and objective conditions such as epidemiological indicators, number of infections, incidents, level of financial support, progress with the vaccination plan, and other variables. Aware that the protection of our compatriots' life and health was going to depend very heavily on the timely acquisition of COVID-19 vaccines, in April last year we began contacting the main laboratories that were researching and developing a vaccine against the coronavirus.

We reached agreements and made contracts with different laboratories that enabled us to ensure vaccines for the entire population over 3 years of age in our country. Thanks to this early initiative and also to the admirable commitment of health workers, Chile became the first country in South America to begin the vaccination process. To date, we have administered more than 30 million doses, which means that about three-quarters of our population is now fully vaccinated. On July 1, we started vaccinating children between 12 and 17 years old, and a few days ago we also included children between 6 and 11 years old. We have also started giving booster doses to people over 55 years of age. More than two-thirds of those over 65 who had already been fully vaccinated have already had a booster shot.

Along with strengthening the health safety net, we also built a social safety net to compensate, alleviate, and mitigate the devastating social effects of the pandemic and the global economic recession. This social safety net has delivered support and relief to families, workers, and small businesses equivalent to about 10% of our gross domestic product. Protection and relief has been provided to 16 million of Chile's 19 million people. The pandemic caused output to drop by 5.8% last year, while also destroying more than two million jobs. To date, this represents more than 22% of the total working population.

But despite the severity of the crisis, Chile was able to resume its pre-pandemic level of economic activity in March this year. Twelve months after the first case was detected, we also managed to recover about 1.9 million of the jobs lost, and this year our economy will grow by around 10%. I want to end this speech by highlighting the lessons of this pandemic, for example, the value of family, the need to be more humble and recognize our weaknesses, the importance of a committed State, and collaboration between the State and civil society.

Finally, just as no lone individual can save themselves from the pandemic because they need the responsibility and solidarity of their community, countries cannot save themselves either. Without the responsible and supportive collaboration of the international community, in the end, no one will be truly safe until we are all reasonably safe. That is why I want to reiterate the urgent need to strengthen multilateral institutions. And to achieve this objective, with the support of WHO, PAHO, and also the European Union, we are promoting a new treaty for the

prevention of and response to future pandemics. No one can say for sure that we will not have to face new pandemics in the future. But we must ensure, today, that when this happens, we will be much better prepared and able to act more quickly, with coordination and solidarity to better prevent and mitigate the consequences of future pandemics.

Thank you very much.
