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## WEEKLY PRESS BRIEFING ON COVID-19: DIRECTOR'S REMARKS—14 JULY 2020

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Good morning, thank you for joining today's briefing.

As of July 13, we have reached 6.8 million cases and 288,000 deaths across the region of the Americas. This equates to roughly half of all cases and deaths reported around the world. In the past week, our region has reported 60% of all new cases and 64% of all new deaths in the world.

Since our last briefing, we witnessed another record-breaking week as regional hotspots, like the U.S., reported their highest-ever daily case counts. The number of people dying of COVID-19 is also climbing, particularly in Brazil, Mexico and the United States of America, reporting 77% of all the deaths in the Region over the last week and currently experiencing some of the deadliest outbreaks in the world.

The most vulnerable populations have been hit the hardest. For instance, indigenous communities along the Amazon basin are seeing incidence rates more than five times than general population.

The last few months have ushered unprecedented collaboration among scientists, governments and global partners to develop coronavirus treatments and vaccines in record time. Today, there are more than 150 vaccine candidates in the pipeline and more than 20 of these are already being tested on volunteers—with active participation of countries in our region, such as United States of America, Canada, Brazil and Argentina.

It's important that Latin America and the Caribbean join these clinical trials so we can participate in this global effort to accelerate the development of vaccines that are safe and effective for everyone. However, countries should only participate if it is done right, with the adoption of proper regulatory, technical and ethical measures.

PAHO is actively engaged with our Member States and their National Regulatory Authorities to provide technical cooperation on all important matters regarding clinical trials as they participate in these urgent endeavors.

The PAHO Revolving Fund for vaccines has a strategic role to play in the access to a vaccine for COVID-19. This is unique for the Americas, which is the only region with a shared mechanism for purchasing and delivering vaccines.

For the past 35 years, through the PAHO Revolving Fund, countries have pooled their resources to purchase high-quality, life-saving vaccines at lower prices. More than 41 countries and territories across our region have used this mechanism to purchase vaccines for their national immunization programs.

Through this fund, we've vaccinated generations of children, helping us to become the first global region to eliminate polio, and the only region to have eliminated measles, and rubella. Today, we have some of the highest immunization rates around the world and have facilitated the swift introduction of new vaccines. This is remarkable, especially considering the diversity and inequities that persist in the Americas.

In this spirit of regional cooperation, we are supporting Latin American and Caribbean countries to join a landmark collaboration to accelerate the development, production and distribution of future COVID-19 vaccines.

Housed under WHO's Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, the COVAX Facility is grounded in the same principles of our Revolving Fund: shared resources and equitable access at affordable prices. The facility will negotiate on behalf of many countries worldwide with the producers of all promising COVID-19 vaccine candidates.

This will enable countries – regardless of income level – to secure better prices and assume less risk than if they negotiate individually. No country should do this alone—especially since we improve our chances of success and reduce competition if we work together.

The COVAX Facility is the best option to guarantee equitable access through fair allocation across countries and to reduce the risks of having no supply if a specific vaccine candidate fails.

PAHO has been actively involved in the COVAX Facility negotiations and is working to secure the best possible conditions for the countries in our region.

This includes having our Member States from Latin America and the Caribbean join the COVAX Facility through our Revolving Fund. Acting as a bloc, PAHO Member States will benefit from our technical expertise, as well as our decades of experience securing and distributing vaccines quickly and efficiently. We will also ensure the process is as inclusive as possible by allocating doses fairly among those countries participating.

PAHO will work with our Member States to establish the best immunization strategies, and to strengthen and adapt the systems that may be required to deliver these novel vaccines. Together we will focus on protecting those most at risk: health workers, the elderly and people with comorbidities.

PAHO is also coordinating with Gavi and other partners to guarantee that the most vulnerable countries in our region receive the vaccine against COVID 19 in a subsidized and at an affordable price.

We already have 30 countries and territories joining the facility through PAHO's Revolving Fund, and we are excited to see more expressions of interest from our Member States in the coming days. The more countries that join, the stronger we will be.

This virus has redefined how we perceive time. In a few short months, it has transformed our way of life, our region and our economies.

We must look ahead to plan how we will select, manufacture, pay for and distribute a vaccine. We need to improve our regulatory capacities on immunization, build vaccine post marketing surveillance, boost vaccination programs, and improve or adapt our cold chain facilities.

And we must work now to strengthen our capacity that will allow us to reach our vulnerable communities once we find a successful vaccine. If not, it may take years for people to be vaccinated for COVID-19, and we can't afford that delay!

We must seize this moment and work together toward a future where everyone—regardless of who they are or where they live—can receive lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines.