



Organización  
Panamericana  
de la Salud



Organización  
Mundial de la Salud  
OFICINA REGIONAL PARA LAS Américas

## **59th DIRECTING COUNCIL**

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

*Virtual Session, 20-24 September 2021*

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**OPENING REMARKS BY THE HON. MR. MAURICIO CLAVER-CARONE  
PRESIDENT OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK**

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**20 September 2021**

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

Good morning to you all. It is an honor to participate in the opening session of this fifty-ninth Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), for the seventy-third session of the Regional Committee of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the Americas. I would like to extend a cordial greeting to everyone from New York, where I am attending the United Nations General Assembly.

I would like to take this opportunity to applaud Dr. Etienne's leadership and her tireless advocacy for the health needs of our Region.

On behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), let me also thank the PAHO staff and partner institutions for their dedication to the well-being of the peoples of the Americas, especially in these times of crisis.

We are proud to continue our collaboration with you, as we have done since the first case of COVID-19 was detected in our Region.

Only by working together will we overcome this pandemic and the challenges we face both as a Region and globally. International cooperation and solidarity are more important than ever.

I wish to address all of the Ministers of Health assembled here today.

You are all well aware of how the people of our Region have suffered from the impact of this pandemic, and you have been tasked with responding to a health challenge of historic proportions.

Let me express my sincere thanks to you all on behalf of our member countries for everything you have done during this period to halt the transmission of the coronavirus, provide assistance to COVID-19 patients, and advance national vaccination campaigns – work that has helped ensure the continuity of vital health services.

And let me offer special thanks to the many health professionals in their respective countries, who have been, and continue to be, the true heroes in this struggle.

As you know, the world's population is facing the historic challenge of bringing about a robust, inclusive, and sustainable post-crisis recovery. Latin America and the Caribbean have been

one of the world regions most impacted by the pandemic, and we all recognize the urgency of moving forward with the recovery effort.

At the same time, this is but one of the many crises affecting our Region. We are also facing the destruction and disruption caused by climate change; the human, social, and economic costs of migration in the Region; as well as inequality and corruption, among other challenges.

Our health systems have been tested as never before, and we have seen severe setbacks in the supply and use of essential services, such as sexual and reproductive health, immunization, and chronic disease care.

We also face pressing challenges, such as the effects of the pandemic on mental health, and an increase in the number of cases of violence against women and children, to cite just one example.

Although it is impossible to say with certainty when this acute phase of the pandemic will end, we must persist in our work, so as to hasten the arrival of that day as soon as possible.

I can assure you that the IDB will continue its strong support for our countries, setting our sights on a post-pandemic future.

We are here to make our Region healthier in every way, including in the economic, environmental, and social spheres.

We have increased the availability of funds, adjusted lending instruments, and streamlined the Bank's approval procedures to help speed the process of obtaining necessary resources.

This has aided efforts to respond to COVID-19, thereby providing a direct benefit to our member countries. We have achieved this in record fashion, through loans and by mobilizing the public and private sectors.

We also raised an additional one billion dollars specifically to support the purchase, deployment, and distribution of vaccines, including through the COVAX facility.

In the Dominican Republic, we are also using our Contingent Credit Facility for Natural Disaster Emergencies, a tool we modified last year to cover pandemics.

In addition, we launched an innovative initiative to improve the competitive ability of our borrowing members to obtain vaccines using IDB guarantees.

We will continue to help countries emerge from this phase of the pandemic, restore essential health services, protect the most vulnerable populations, and boost economic growth and employment.

It is therefore essential to promote broad and rapid access to COVID-19 vaccinations, and to continue implementing the vital public health measures that have been carried out to date.

Equitable access to vaccines — both globally and nationally — continues to be key to creating a post-pandemic world in which we can take advantage of these opportunities.

The IDB, PAHO, and other international partners will continue to collaborate closely, and to support the purchasing mechanisms that countries choose, as well as to support multilateral alliances to expand the production of vaccines in the Region.

I believe we must also see this moment as an opportunity to strengthen digitization and regional integration, as these have the potential to unlock enormous socio-economic benefits for our countries.

During this time, we have learned the essential importance of the digital transformation of the healthcare sector.

Its potential for strengthening epidemiological surveillance efforts has become clear, by facilitating access to and use of telemedicine services, enabling communication, and providing data for real-time decision-making, to mention just some of its applications.

In Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, among other countries, we are working to develop and expand telemedicine, in order to increase coverage and enable access to specialists.

We look forward to continued collaboration with PAHO, in efforts to deepen and accelerate this transformative agenda in all of the countries.

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable populations, an indication of the need to take specific measures to protect these groups, both with regard to health and in the economic and social areas.

We are proud of our programs such as the *Salud Mesoamérica* initiative, which addresses one of the main causes of mortality among the poorest segments of the population through better obstetric and neonatal care.

PAHO continues to be an important driver of progress in this area and a key player in the full range of health challenges and achievements in our Region.

You, our Region's health ministers, continue to show courage and determination in playing a role that is of the outmost importance today.

In closing, let me say that there is great hope and optimism in light of the opportunities for reinvestment and economic growth in our Region that have, ironically, been opened up by the pandemic. I remain firmly convinced that the Americas can re-emerge stronger, with renewed resilience for confronting future challenges.

We must continue to work together to bring about an economic revival. The IDB, as a bank of action, is committed to be here to offer support every step of the way.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to greet you and, especially, for the chance to work together.

I wish you all a productive working day.

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