
DIRECTOR'S REMARKS

120TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION

2 DECEMBER 2022

Thank you, Dr. Elmer Huerta, for the kind introduction.

Distinguished guests, Ambassadors, Secretary General of the OAS, friends, and partners, PAHO colleagues, it is a privilege to be standing before you this evening.

And it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to tonight's event as we celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Pan American Health Organization. Across the Americas there have been many events and celebrations commemorating this milestone in the history of the world's oldest public health institution.

120 years ago, just across the White House Lawn, President Theodore Roosevelt and delegates from 10 other countries across the Americas gathered right here in Washington, D.C. to develop a plan to control yellow fever, which was ravaging our region and delaying construction of the Panama Canal.

It was at that historic meeting that PAHO was born with a simple but powerful mission: to bring health to all peoples of the Americas.

That storied event marked the beginning of health diplomacy for our Region, setting a precedent for countries around the world to follow.

As I look back over the years and the history of this institution, I'm reminded of the power and importance of solidarity to build a healthier, more hopeful future.

Together, PAHO and its Member States have eradicated diseases, built health systems and ensured that more people in the Americas can live healthy, productive lives.

Our Region has done these things even despite political differences, amid global and national conflicts and throughout the many challenges that have faced the Americas over the last 120 years.

For 120 years, the Americas have relied on cooperation because we've understood that our health, our security and our prosperity are interdependent.

Together, we have also understood health's universal value and acceptance, and its potential to serve as a bridge for peace, solidarity and understanding.

That is why the Americas have long been champions of health.

Tonight we will hear messages from three former Directors of the Secretariat of PAHO, who contributed to these successes over a 30 year period: Dr Carlisle Guerra de Macedo, Sir George Alleyne and Dr Mirta Roses. Thank you for the advances that you brought about through your exceptional leadership. And, we dared to stand on your shoulders!

I also wish to remember and thank all the former PAHO staff and contingent workers, who over the 120 years, have served the people of the Americas so selflessly and with the highest excellence.

I have had the honor of leading PAHO as its Director for a decade, and I have seen first-hand the impact of this institution.

During my tenure, we have eliminated the endemic transmission of measles and rubella, helped eight countries end mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis and supported four others as they eliminated river blindness.

Over the last ten years, together we have faced epidemics of Zika and Chikungunya, outbreaks of cholera, and yellow fever, and periodic surges of flu and Dengue.

We have overcome these challenges only because we worked together, sharing data, lessons and expertise.

The COVID pandemic has stood out in scale and scope, but it has underscored, like never before, the importance of solidarity and Pan-Americanism as a foundation for responding to crises.

As we look to the future, I hope our Region can continue to see health as essential to building our most productive and prosperous societies.

And that regardless of what challenges lie ahead, we continue to rely on our regional values of solidarity and collaboration and our unwavering commitment to health equity.

These values have been the bedrock of our institution and the reason we have been able to accomplish so much.

But tonight's event is not one for vision-setting, it is one for celebration.

Throughout this evening, you will hear from leaders across our Region who have borne witness to our region's health gains and continue to play an important role in PAHO's legacy.

Before I invite others to come to the stage, I want to leave you with a note of gratitude.

It has been an honor to serve as your PAHO Director.

I want to thank all of you for the trust you've bestowed in me and your willingness to work together on behalf of the health of our region.

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I also want to take a moment to thank the incredible staff of this organization, whose commitment and professionalism I remain deeply humbled by.

I have learned so much from you and will remain your champion, long after my time here at PAHO ends.

Thank you all for your attention.

Now back over to you Dr. Huerta.