



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



**50th DIRECTING COUNCIL**  
**62nd SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

*Washington, D.C., USA, 27 September -1 October 2010*

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**REMARKS BY THE WINNER OF THE PAHO  
AWARD FOR ADMINISTRATION 2010  
DR. ELSA YOLANDA PALOU GARCÍA**

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Honorable President  
Honorable Ministers of Health  
Distinguished Delegates  
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Dr. Mirta Roses, Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

For me, it is indeed a privilege to be here with you today to receive the 2010 PAHO Award for Administration, which I accept with great joy and satisfaction. To begin with, I would like to dedicate this award to God for having given me the opportunity to experience this moment; to my family here today, including my mother, children, siblings, and other relatives, for their unconditional support; and to my husband. I would especially like to mention my 22-year-old son, Francisco Javier Fernández Palou, who has cerebral palsy and could not be here today, for having taught me how to fight for what at once seemed impossible and for the strength to continue overcoming obstacles; and my father, who has since passed away, for teaching me the value of convictions. I also wish to dedicate this award to all those along the way who made it possible for me to perform my work as an administrator, teacher, caregiver, and researcher; and to the people of Honduras, who were instrumental to my receiving an education at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH).

In 1985, when the HIV/AIDS epidemic reached Honduras, we needed people to begin caring for our patients and provide training this area for our human health resources so that we could deliver adequate care for the general population, reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with this disease, and collaborate with our authorities in organizing the care of these patients. At that point, I made the decision to confront this challenge and have made it my life's work. Since then, my country has trained more than 300 human health resources to provide care for HIV/AIDS patients, which includes the use of antiretrovirals (ARVs) and the treatment of opportunistic infections. We have managed to raise the level of treatment with ARVs from zero patients in 2002 to more than 8,000 by 2010 by opening some 33 comprehensive health care

centers in Honduras, providing treatment and comprehensive care to patients as near to their communities as possible. We also opened the first HIV/AIDS hospital, which currently serves as a national HIV/AIDS referral and training center in Honduras, providing both in-patient and outpatient care. None of this would have been possible without the support of infectious disease staff and authorities at the National Cardiopulmonary Institute, where I work.

For several years now, our efforts on the National HIV/AIDS Commission—CONSIDA—have led to policies that behalf our patients. CONSIDA has also fought to improve the quality of care, emphasizing prevention activities to curb the epidemic and collaborating to publicize the country's Special Law on HIV/AIDS and ensure compliance.

We have sought to discover the most important elements for managing the care of our patients through research on ARV resistance and TB-HIV management in conjunction with colleagues in Honduras and abroad, who have enabled us to better understand the particular features of our epidemic.

In our undergraduate and teaching activities, we have emphasized the need for a multidisciplinary approach to HIV/AIDS education in our various schools at the UNAH, and we have provided training on that subject for personnel in all the health disciplines in our undergraduate and graduate programs.

At the Office of the Dean of the UNAH medical school, we strive to raise awareness among our colleagues working with HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases through continuing medical education and efforts to optimize their working conditions and improve the conditions of care for our patients.

For some years now, Honduras has collaborated with the Pan American Association of Infectious Diseases in the preparation of Latin American guidelines for ARV management, with PAHO on guidelines for TB-HIV management, and, since 2006, with PAHO's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on HIV/STIs.

In 2008, during my tenure as my country's Secretary of Health, we worked diligently to provide all the necessary support to our national programs for HIV/AIDS, communicable and vector-borne diseases, and maternal and child care and to search for solutions for the country's health problems, as the health system was not responsive to the needs of

the population. We proposed a reform of the health system, which we began to implement, and we had the satisfaction of witnessing significant decreases in maternal and child mortality, as well as substantial increases in vaccination coverage for some of the most neglected areas of Honduras.

None of this progress would have been possible without the contributions of our dedicated, effective, and efficient collaborators, who worked for love of country; nor would it have been possible without the support of the international organizations and agencies. Here, I would especially like to mention the preeminent role played by PAHO, which has always been an invaluable source of technical assistance for our countries, providing us with ongoing support in the analysis, formulation, and implementation of programs and activities in the field of health.

Looking to the future, we envision a reconstruction phase and the improvement of our countries' health systems, where necessary; and the sharing of successes and failures with our peoples and governments, with the ultimate goal of fulfilling the dream we all share: health in the broadest sense of the word that is accessible to all.

Receiving this award encourages me and gives me the strength to continue my efforts along this path as long as God sees fit.

Thank you all very much!