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**REMARKS BY THE WINNER OF THE SÉRGIO AROUCA AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE IN UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE
DR. MARIA FÁTIMA DE SOUSA**

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**50th DIRECTING COUNCIL OF PAHO
Washington, D.C., 27 September 2010**

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

I would like to begin by noting that the Sérgio Arouca Award for Excellence in Universal Health Care is not being bestowed on only one person, as I accept this award together with the community health workers (CHWs) and professionals of the Family Health Program (PSF) teams throughout Brazil, whom I thank for their unwavering support.

I represent part of a collective effort to implement these strategies, supported by the National Council of Health Secretaries (CONASS) and the National Council of Municipal Health Departments (CONASEMS). This effort began in 12 pioneering municipalities, especially the municipality of Campina Grande in the State of Paraíba, located in the Brazilian Northeast, where I was born. Today, both the Pan American Health and Education Foundation (PAHEF) and Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) recognize the value of this effort.

Our work in this regard is part of a virtuous cycle to extend health care access to the individuals, families, and communities of my country. I was fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time to connect with other innovative thinkers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my friend Halim Girade, a physician who led me to the Ministry of Health in Brasília. There I worked in the administration of former Minister of Health Henrique Santillo (may he rest in peace), who made it possible for me to join the government of former president Itamar Franco, where I was able to continue my work addressing the challenges of the other states of the Union.

Today, there are 240,000 community health workers, 32,000 PSF teams, and 20,000 oral health teams working in 5,357 municipalities across Brazil. At present, only 207 cities remain before coverage of community health workers visits can be extended to all Brazilian families. These professionals work tirelessly to identify all those in need, providing health services that include treatment for diabetes, hypertension, Hansen's disease, alcoholism, dengue, as well as prenatal care and instruction on breast-feeding and smoking cessation, along with many other activities that still require the integration of public policies, with a view to developing environmentally friendly and healthy environments that are conducive to promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence.

As a nurse who trained at the Federal University of Paraíba, I am part of the Brazilian health sector reform movement that has been under way for the past 30 years. During this time, I had the opportunity to work alongside Dr. Sérgio Arouca, a physician whose achievements in the field of public health in Brazil I can never forget and who, along with Dr. Eduardo Jorge Alves Sobrinho, were both instrumental in enshrining the duty of the State to guarantee the right to health for all in the Brazilian Constitution. I would also like to thank all of you, my eternal mentors.

Likewise, I wish to thank the directors of the Pan American Health and Education Foundation (PAHEF) and PAHO for having examined my justification for receiving this award with "eyes of the heart."

I wish to dedicate this Sérgio Arouca Award for Excellence in Universal Health Care to my young students in the Public Health Department of the School of Health Sciences, and to the researchers at the University of Brasilia's School of Public Health Studies, where I share the little I have learned over the past 25 years with the current and future health professionals of my country.

As a woman from the Northeast who grew up poor, I learned to read at the age of 12, when I was taken under the wing of Mother Aurélia at the Nossa Senhora Auxiliadora School in the municipality of Sousa. Her lessons continue to resonate with me to this day as sound advice for life, along with those I was taught by my father, Argemiro Honorato de Sousa, and my mother, Francisca Henrique de Lima (may she rest in peace). I also dedicate this award to her as a testament to her strength, courage, and wisdom in the face of hardship, a woman whose serene, firm, and decisive nature helped her overcome the most difficult

obstacles in the course of her life. She always held her head high and taught us never to look back, but to continue forward, working passionately and steadfastly guided by the values of love and respect for our fellow man. She taught us that in the struggle for justice (sharing our daily bread with those in need) and freedom (the right to come and go without harming others), we should not sully our hands or hearts with falsehoods, hate, grief, or malice. Instead, she encouraged us to view our daily struggles with eyes of love and strength of the soul.

Oh, beloved mother and teacher, wherever you may be may you rest in peace! And may you know that your children, including me, remember what you taught us. Today, I follow my path in life with your lessons ever-present: “never stop or despair, fight for your dreams, and always have faith in the future.” It is with this faith in the future that I continue to believe that the causes of virtue and justice are not lost. And that it is possible to open the windows of opportunity to ensure that all Brazilian families enjoy good health. Herein lies the reason for my ongoing and passionate work. It is also the result of your lessons, dearest mother.

Thank you very much!