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Thank you, Dr. Valdez, for that kind introduction, and for your leadership as President of the Directing Council.

I'm honored to welcome you to Washington and stand with leaders like President Hernández, the many distinguished ministers and delegates, and leaders from our Region.

We are here today to stand with shared resolve, to face our shared challenges. Working together, we have the opportunity to make important progress for our Region of the world.

As partners, we have achieved some historic milestones. We are the first Region in the world to eliminate endemic rubella virus transmission and congenital rubella syndrome. By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we have set an ambitious agenda.

And here in the US, we have dramatically increased access to affordable, quality health coverage for more than 17 million Americans through the Affordable Care Act. We are committed to making further improvements to better serve our people and make our health care system stronger.

The progress we have made together will help us chart a path toward healthier communities and more equitable societies, but we have more to do.

Ebola, International Health Regulations, and the Global Health Security Agenda

One of our most pressing challenges is the global threat of infectious diseases, and the global response that it requires. We saw the need for a strong health system that prioritizes prevention and preparedness in our ongoing efforts to end the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, and with other emerging diseases.

A key part of our preparedness effort has been the Global Health Security Agenda, where we focus on building capacity to address infectious disease threats and reaching the goals of the International Health Regulations.

Another lesson we've learned is that the world needs a nimble, effective World Health Organization. We haven't yet reached that goal, but we've made progress toward reform. We will continue to push for changes that make WHO better equipped to respond to the health needs of our world, and PAHO and the Americas Region are well-positioned to champion and model these reforms.

Violence Against Women

And as we consider the health of our nations, we must fight harder to end the oppression and violence that women face every day.

Worldwide, one in every three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, usually by an intimate partner. This insidious violence crosses ethnicity, class, religion, socio-economic status, and race. It is one of the top human rights challenges of our time and we, the health sector, must respond.

This week, the Directing Council will consider the PAHO Strategy and Plan of Action on Strengthening the Health System to Address Violence Against Women.

We stand with so many of you to call for an end to discrimination and gender-based violence in all its forms. Together, we can end the brutality against all who are victimized because of their gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Conclusion

Our Region faces many health challenges, but we are stronger together. PAHO reminds us that our individual futures are determined by our collective actions. Together, we can hand a safer and healthier world to the next generation.

Thank you.