

10th Anniversary FCTC (PAHO, March 3rd 2015)

Closing remarks by Carlos Santos-Burgoa Unit Chief, Risk Factors and Nutrition. NMH

I want to thank the perspectives by Drs. Roa, Hennis, Sandoval, and the messages by Drs. Etienne and Da Costa E Silva, as well as all of those participating in the Question and Answers session.

Since I have memory of my child life, I lived with my grandfather, a veteran of the Great War and of Second World War. He gave me unique love, and he forged my character; he showed me how to build my physical environment, and to foresight my will in life. And all those years, I saw him struggling for his life, from emphysema and stomach cancer caused by his tobacco consumption, until I was nine years old; unfortunately I was not there with him to say goodbye.

This pain is happening over and over throughout our families, our countrymen, throughout the world.

The health consequences attributable to tobacco are the largest contributor to the huge epidemic of Noncommunicable Diseases: it clearly demonstrates that NCDs are manmade derived from the marketing and consumption of toxic commodities. It also demonstrates that such human action can be controlled and deterred, not only by health promotion, but mainly by the State taking the ethical and political responsibility of caring to protect the population from avoidable harm. When Ministries of Health and Heads of State and Government take the leadership, they are unstoppable: the health argument is irrefutable, and the action needed, immediate. After that, the implementation is in the hands of well equipped and supported public health officers, backed by officers in other government sectors and credible authorities, well isolated from the interference of industry.

All these are lessons for the broader public health.

Today we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the coming into force of the FCTC.

Today we are celebrating progress, some victories, many battles given, and the readiness for many battles to come.

We are celebrating all those governmental officials and advocates that have made possible those countries in green in the maps shown today. **They are saving millions of lives, millions.**

Because of the FCTC, and the leadership of Heads of State and Government and of Ministers of Health, and because of the work of government officials, specially those responsible for public health, more people in our region are enjoying smoke free environments, more kids are not being exposed to inaccurate and distorted information through tobacco advertising and promotion and on the contrary see that tobacco packaging reflect truthfully what it contains and the harm associated to it.

Today we have also seen that the progress is not homogenous in our region, not between countries, neither so within countries. Some policies have seen more advances than others; some countries have done more than others. We celebrate the advances, but we know that much more can and should be advanced by all PAHO Member States. We also know that if they have not progressed more that is because a combination of strong pressure and interference of economic interests, and weak institutions. It is striking that only 5 countries in our region have implemented at least 4 of the six most effective measures. That number needs to go up! It worries that 50% of our countries have implemented only one to three measures and that 13 countries have NO policy implemented. This is unacceptable: we can not declare a policy by signing a Treaty and therefore making it a national law on a risk that harms so many people, but afterwards do nothing. We have to move all signatories of the FCTC into **full execution mode**. It is not only what we should expect, but the right thing to do.

Still, industry is suing one of our Member States, and is using our countries to launch international challenges to the right implementation of the FCTC. We have to remember that in 2010 our Member States have endorsed PAHO's Secretariat work on supporting our member states when being challenged for rightfully implementing the FCTC. *We are working on that.*

We know that inside the countries, even those that have not signed the FCTC, advances have been done, in a heterogeneous manner. We encourage civil society and all professionals within those countries in red to keep on advancing.

Much more work has to be done. Dr Reina Roa has illustrated very well and in detail the challenges ahead. We just heard last Friday that Ireland approved plain packaging of tobacco products following the steps of Australia. We need a champion in our Region to would lead us to that end of the game that she mentions. But even more than that, we need the map that Rosa presented showing all countries in green: no exceptions, all countries fulfilling the FCTC. 10 years ago we thought it was a dream to have a law banning smoking in all public places including bars and restaurants, now 17 countries mandate that. Let's dream for a region where all 35 countries have banned smoking in public places, those remaining 18 to join in the group and while doing that implementing the rest of the FCTC too.

20 months ago I had the privilege of joining the Department of NMH, and I was given the opportunity to support the *Tobacco Team at PAHO*. I have learned a lot from them, and everybody within our unit and our department has identified so many lessons to confront the challenges to Public Health. ***I want to take the opportunity to recognize in front of all of you, the strength, tenacity, commitment, professionalism, leadership and courage of PAHO's Tobacco Team, coordinated by Adriana Blanco, integrated with Rosa Sandoval, Roberta Caixeta, and supported by so many country advisors who devote their enthusiasm and dedication to the FCTC.***

For them, I ask all of you for a strong applause.

I also want to acknowledge the support and impetus of our Department Director who has not hesitated in including Tobacco Control as a priority initiative for the Department. And I want to highlight the full support of Dr. Carissa Etienne, our Director that has never hesitated to support and to speak up against tobacco.

Thank all of you for your presence in this celebration, here at the Regional Office and at all the sites connected by web throughout the Americas.

This is a step forward in a *long long walk to free the humanity from the oppression of the tobacco dependency.*

Thank you, again.