



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

29th PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE

69th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

Washington, D.C., USA, 25-29 September 2017

CSP29/DIV/1
Original: English

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE OUTGOING PRESIDENT
OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE, HON. NICKOLAS STEELE
MINISTER OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SECURITY AND
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS OF GRENADA**

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**25 September 2017
Washington, D.C.**

**29th Pan American Sanitary Conference
69th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau,
Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization,
Honorable Ministers of Health,
Distinguished Delegates and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Invited Agency Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Special salutations.

On behalf of the People of Grenada and our Government, allow me to offer a warm and fraternal greeting to everyone present.

I want to thank this noble organization for having entrusted Grenada with the presidency at the 28th Pan American Sanitary Conference held in 2012 of the Pan American Health Organization.

Special mention must go out to brothers and sisters of our neighboring Caribbean territories including Puerto Rico who have been devastated by hurricanes Irma and Maria in recent weeks. Our prayers and thoughts also go out to our regional brothers and sisters in Mexico who lost hundreds of lives in recent earthquakes. Of course we cannot forget our friends in Texas and parts of Florida who also suffered damages at the hands of Irma.

Apart from the psychological trauma and suffering which our people have endured and continue to endure these natural disasters truly expose the vulnerability of our small island states. The estimated damage caused by Harvey and Irma to the southern United States amounted to around 1.5 % of their GDP. The estimated damaged due to Irma and now Maria exceeds 200-500% of these countries GDP. I am particularly sensitive to our family in Barbuda and Dominica who are in the words of Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit's United Nations General Assembly address "*We as a country and as a region did not start this war against nature! We did not provoke it! The war has come to us!!*"

Madam President the vulnerability of this region has also been exposed as shown in the recent outbreak of the Zika virus in 2016 which had tremendous impact on lives as well as our economies. This was on the heels of the of the Chikungunya epidemic in 2014 which has had considerable economic impact in the Caribbean as well as Central and South America. These events constitute major stumbling blocks for our overall development and more so for the health of the people and our abilities to achieve important developmental milestones like the SDG's and other global targets.

The people of this region are however resilient. I am confident that they will not only build back their lives and systems but built them back stronger.

I am also confident that afforded the opportunity (barring these category 5 plus disasters that are mainly due to climate change) the recent gains achieved in immunization and the elimination of diseases like measles, rubella and congenital Rubella Syndrome, the advances in the area of mother to child transmission of HIV and the advances in the fight of both communicable and noncommunicable diseases although under threat will be preserved and improved.

The resilience of our peoples can also be seen in the recent advances made in constructing platforms in the area of universal health coverage, human resources for health, childhood obesity, surveillance, matters of global health security and International Health Regulations (IHR).

Notwithstanding the tangible resilience demonstrated by the peoples of this region the environment in which we live and our geographical locations exposes us to acts of mother nature that severely threatens our socio economic well-being and by extension the health of our peoples.

Therefore the mantra of this organization which speaks to building of strong resilient and sustainable health care systems cannot be more relevant. It is our concerted view that given the realities of the times in which we live, this is our only option. Our clarion call therefore remains steadfast that this organization continues to redouble its efforts at ensuring that every child is vaccinated against vaccine preventable diseases, that primary health care systems are strengthen, universal health coverage be forged ahead with, that obesity and its supporting environment be tackled and that the organizations resolve in the fight against new emerging diseases as well as chronic noncommunicable diseases be advanced in innovative ways never before imagined or employed.

I thank you.
