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Director, PAHO
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**DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION OF THE FIRST LADY
MRS. HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
WORLD HEALTH DAY
(Washington, D.C.)**

Good morning. It is an honor, and a very great pleasure, for me to welcome the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is here to join us and people from 189 countries worldwide to celebrate World Health Day.

This is a very special event for us -- another one of the special events that have taken place in this room. It was here, only five months ago, that history was made when the International Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication declared that wild poliovirus transmission has been interrupted in the Americas.

The tremendous public health success of the polio eradication effort in the Americas could not have happened without the strong political commitment of the United States and the 37 other Member Governments of PAHO: it would have been impossible without the support of UNICEF, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Canadian Public Health Association and Rotary International. We can be proud that the rest of the world is following our example and working to achieve global eradication of polio, ending forever this threat to all children.

Polio eradication is the theme of World Health Day; but for us this must be a staging post on our way. In the Americas, we are embarking on a new challenge, the elimination of measles.

If we are to be up to this challenge, we will need the continued support of the United States, of all our other Member Governments, the international community, and nongovernmental organizations.

We know what we have to do and how to do it: we must maintain high immunization coverage and a sensitive surveillance system. We must make effective use of social communication to inform everyone about the need for measles vaccination. We must ensure the political commitment and the high level of community participation that made the eradication of polio possible.

We are pleased, Mrs. Clinton, that you are the first First Lady to appear at a World Health Day ceremony in the Pan American Health Organization -in this that has been called the Hall of Health of the Americas. Your commitment to the welfare of children has been made patent to the world.

* **Pan American Health Organization, Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization.**

Your work with Marian Wright Edelman at the Children's Defense Fund has set an example for advocacy in defence of the rights of children.

A primary right of children is the right to live a healthy life, and immunization is one of the indispensable measures to ensure that they do so.

From time immemorial the health community has sought to protect the lives of children, and by wiping out smallpox from the Americas in 1973 and from the world in 1978, eradicating polio from this hemisphere in 1994, and now setting out to eliminate measles, we are keeping faith with that tradition. There can be no more important task, and we are most grateful for your support.

Mrs. Clinton, I am proud and pleased that you have joined us in this effort. The enthusiasm that has been generated over the eradication of polio from this hemisphere, the high expectations around the elimination of measles must be seen also as instruments that help us to place the issue of the health of our people on a higher plane in the public agenda. I thank you again for coming.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to present to you the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton who will now address us.