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Director, PAHO*
7 February 1996**

**ADDRESS GIVEN AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF HAITI
(Port-au-Prince, Haïti)**

Mr. President,
Mr. Minister,
Your Eminences,
Distinguished colleagues,
Members of the media,
Ladies and gentlemen:

Good morning,

Tomorrow will be a historically important day for all Haitians. Today is an important day, especially for Haitian mothers, an important day for the health services of Haiti and an important day for me and my colleagues of the Pan American Health Organization. What we are celebrating here today is a clear manifestation of what can happen when there is political will, a clear definition of the problem, and a united effort of partners in health.

The last time I visited Haiti was in March 1995 and I left with many vivid memories of a proud people struggling to overcome many adversities. But two things stand out in my mind. One was a visit to His Excellency President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who assured me that the same way Haitians were prepared to fight for their democracy, they were prepared to fight for health. He and I shared a vision of health and attention to health in Haiti serving as one of the important instruments for national unity and national development.

The other vivid memory was a visit to the maternity hospital when Dr. Rodolphe Malebranche your current Minister of Health, in his capacity of Director of the Hospital, kindly received me. He and I agreed that the conditions were intolerable and an insult to the dignity of Haitian women. They should not have to bring Haitian children into the world in such conditions. I remember challenging the press to awake public sentiment to the need to change the situation. I was pleased to hear that on Mother's Day 1995, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide visited the maternity hospital and gave a firm commitment to improve the situation.

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I am proud to see the project completed and proud that the Pan American Health Organization through its technical cooperation with Haiti could have joined forces with other partners, such as USAID and UNICEF, to achieve this result. This facility is beautiful now. And let me challenge the press again to make sure that it is kept in this beautiful condition.

I am told that this maternity ward will be the referral center for high risk pregnancies and the care, as well as the training, given here will contribute to reducing the maternal mortality in Haiti.

Many young Haitians will see the light in this ward under good sanitary conditions and they will come into a democratic country strengthened by the historic transition of tomorrow.

Mr. Minister, Mr. President, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to share this joyful moment with you and let me pledge to you and all Haitians the continuing cooperation of the Pan American Health Organization.