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**25 April 1995**

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**OPENING SESSION OF IX RIMSA**  
**(Washington, D.C.)**

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It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Pan American Health Organization for this IX Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Animal Health (RIMSA). It is worthwhile remembering the origin of these meetings and the thoughts behind this approximation of interests of those who work in animal health and those whose major concern is the health of humans.

In 1951, at the request of the Organization of American States, the Pan American Health Organization agreed to administer the Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center, known as PANAFMOSA. The control of this disease was a matter of hemispheric concern. This marked the beginning of PAHO's relations with the agricultural sector. In 1968, the Director of PAHO, perceiving the need for more direct participation by the agricultural sector, convened the I Inter-American Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss matters of common interest to agriculture and public health, such as food production and protection and zoonosis control.

On that occasion, in his opening address to the Ministers of Agriculture, the then Director of the Pan American Health Organization, Dr. Abraham Horwitz, said: "We would like this Meeting to be the first of a series in which, together with the pleasure of your company, we have the opportunity to discuss the progress and its consequences, the obstacles and their alternatives, in all aspects of our work in which prolonging human life depends essentially on agricultural and livestock production and the productivity, research, and the university training of professionals and technicians. Hence, your extensive experience would serve to guide us in improving the exercise of our responsibilities."

Since that time, the Organization has been collaborating with the agricultural sector in a series of activities, developing an animal health infrastructure that is currently enabling the national services to formulate the most appropriate strategies and implement them for the eradication of animal diseases that jeopardize the production and marketing of food as well as such diseases that also affect public health.

The control of foot-and-mouth disease has been a major concern, and we can point to three significant actions that have had an important impact on both the countries and our technical cooperation program. The first was the implementation of the hemispheric information system based on geographical quadrants, that allowed the epidemiological characterization of the livestock

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

production ecosystems. This, in turn, made it possible to develop local strategies for the control and eradication of the disease. The second was the technological transfer of the oil-adjuvant vaccine developed by PANAFTOSA, which has led to a reduction in the costs of the vaccination campaigns for the countries and given them the security of having a vaccine of proven quality. The third has been coordination among the countries, especially in border areas, which has led to an improvement in the trade of healthy animals and their products and the establishment of neighboring sanitary areas under official control--for example, the River Plate Basin Agreement among Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The intersectoral approach has also led to the establishment of other regional programs, such as the one devoted to the elimination of human rabies. This program was launched in 1980, when the Organization's former Pan American Zoonoses Center improved and transferred the technology of the rabies vaccine developed in the brains of suckling mice, making it possible for the countries to produce an effective low-cost vaccine of proven quality that was easily manageable in the field. Rabies is now under control in the capitals and large, major cities of the Americas; the "rare" human cases are reported, for the most part, among people from rural or marginal areas with less than 50,000 inhabitants.

There is no doubt that science and technology have led to healthier livestock herds and, consequently, to an increase in the production of food of animal origin and other agricultural products. However, the increasing use of chemical substances to control agricultural pests and fertilize croplands and pastures and the use of veterinary drugs have created direct and indirect risks to human health. These substances build up in agricultural products, and their residue in food is harmful to the health of those who consume them. For example, the risk of cerebral cancer among farmers in the industrialized countries is 6.5 times greater than among the general population because of the phenol and organochlorine compounds, insecticides, and solvents utilized in agriculture.

There is a dual concern: the need for a sufficient amount of safe food for the population and for that food to be accepted in the national and international markets.

To meet the demand for technical cooperation generated by these national concerns, in November 1991, the Organization, through the generosity of the Argentine Government, established the Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses, or INPPAZ. The principal function of INPPAZ is to serve as an international reference institution in food safety and as a technical cooperation agency for the development of national programs for the sanitary protection of food.

At this Meeting, the program budget proposals of PANAFTOSA and INPPAZ will be analyzed. Your recommendations in this regard will be very valuable in orienting the technical cooperation of these centers in order to develop the national programs.

You will also have an opportunity to share your national experiences with sectoral policies on the topics to be discussed by the two panels. The first will deal with "The Production and Marketing of Food and the Protection of Public Health," and the second will cover "The Intersectoral Approach in Agriculture and Health: Policies on Agricultural and Livestock Development, Environmental Protection, and Health." I hope the dialogue that follows the

presentations of the Ministers will lead to conclusions that will help the Organization to orient appropriately its technical cooperation to the agricultural sector.

The intersectoral approach is the most viable method for optimizing the available resources and concentrating them in order to respond systemically to the deteriorating food situation, population growth, and the degradation of the natural systems that sustain agriculture. Our Organization will continue to encourage and promote the intersectoral approach, because through it we can achieve a balance among population, food, and environment.

I must express my appreciation for the participation of both the Director-General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture and the Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organization, important technical cooperation agencies for the Americas in the production and marketing of food. I have no doubt that their participation at this meeting will greatly benefit the social and economic objectives of the important national, subregional, and regional projects being carried out by the countries, with the common goal of improving the well-being of the people of the Americas, particularly those that are most disadvantaged.

I would also like to thank the Ministers of Agriculture and Health for their presence and participation at this meeting and I wish to reiterate to the observer institutions and special guests that PAHO is also at their disposal for the discussion and undertaking of joint challenges aimed at promoting and improving health in all its dimensions.

Honourable Ministers and special guests, on opening the IX Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Animal Health, I wish you well in your discussions, and I look forward to your recommendations and resolutions. Meetings of this kind that are focussed on matters of mutual interest represent one other mechanism for strengthening that Pan Americanism that is one of the fundamental objectives of the Pan American Health Organization.