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Director, PAHO
7 April 1995**

**WORLD HEALTH DAY 1995
TARGET 2000 – A WORLD WITHOUT POLIO **
(Washington, D.C.)**

World Health Day, observed in 189 countries worldwide every April 7, offers an opportunity to promote the necessary improvement of health conditions, especially for the millions of persons around the globe who still lack access to health care. For 1995, the global theme is "Target 2000 - A World Without Polio."

This is a fitting theme for the Member Countries of the Pan American Health Organization, after the dramatic announcement made in Washington, D.C. on 29 September 1994, by Nobel Prize winner Dr. Frederick Robbins, President of the International Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication, who said, "It has now been three years since the last confirmed case of paralytic Poliomyelitis due to wild poliovirus was reported in the Americas... Based on the impressive evidence presented, the Commission concludes that wild poliovirus transmission has been interrupted in the Americas."

How could a hemisphere which in 1985 was suffering from political and social instability, and was plagued by poverty and armed conflict, unite to eradicate a virus that throughout history has killed or disabled 10 million people? And what does this mean for the rest of the world, and for our future plans in the Americas?

The success of the polio eradication effort in the Americas can be attributed to several factors, including a very high level of political commitment, dedicated community participation, social mobilization and a remarkable degree of solidarity among all peoples of our Region. The strong and steadfast collaboration of the U.S. Agency for International Development, UNICEF, Rotary International, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Canadian Public Health Association, and other agencies and organizations, working together with PAHO towards the same goal, was a critical part of this success.

As I mention UNICEF my thoughts turn to Jim Grant, whose tenacity of purpose in his struggle for the rights of children, and whose dedication to their health made him

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

** **Director's Message on World Health Day 1995.**

one of the true icons of health of our time. We owe him a debt that can only be repayed by emulating his zeal and enthusiasm for the causes he held dear.

During the implementation of the ambitious plan for polio eradication which combined National Immunization Days with intensive surveillance and active social mobilization efforts, thousands of health workers throughout the Americas

vaccinated millions of children, and more than 20,000 health units searched actively for polio cases.

This work was often carried out in difficult conditions, which nevertheless brought out the best in people. For example, in a mass vaccination campaign during an extremely hot summer in Peru, hundreds of citizens offered their

To achieve this goal, we will need to use the polio model as our template for success, maintaining high immunization coverage, a sensitive surveillance system, continued political commitment, active community participation, and constant and effective social communication. As before, we will need financial support from other agencies and we have begun to discuss possible coordination and financial support with AID, the Inter-American Development Bank and our other partners, such as UNICEF, CIDA and others.

But today is not only about lauding our successful efforts against polio, or to announce our intention to eliminate measles. World Health Day serves to drive home the message that we must continue to educate the public and raise awareness about the benefits of immunizing our children. Vaccines represent one of modern science's most cost-effective and important health interventions, and place in our hands the tools to save children's lives and ensure that they grow up to be fit, productive participants in society~ We must work to bring this vital information to those families who do not already know this and to convince them to bring their children to the nearest health center for vaccination.

There is a danger of complacency that goes along with our achievement of polio eradication in the Americas. This is a peril we must fight against.

I ask all of you, political and social leaders, health providers and parents, to join us as we strive to place the benefits of vaccine technology at the disposal of our future generations, and make a better world for all.