

George A. O. Alleyne
Director, PAHO
26 January 1999

ADDRESS TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD **
(Geneva, Switzerland)

Mr. Chairman
Members of the Executive Board
Dr. Brundtland
Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen:

First I must thank the Executive Board for having received and approved my nomination as Regional Director for the Americas of the World Health Organization. It is not too early or too late to say to you in the words of an old song –“thanks for the memories”. I have very precious memories of my first election and taking the oath here in this very room. I have pleasant memories of my contact and association with many of you over the last four years. I recall positively the support from and interaction with the former Director-General, Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima. The most gratifying of all have been the memories of the efforts we have made to improve the health of the people of the Americas and hopefully to have contributed also to the thinking and practice of global health.

These and other memories fortify my resolve to discharge faithfully, and to the best of my ability, those duties and responsibilities that devolve upon me as Regional Director. These responsibilities are essentially twofold. There are those that are rooted in my loyalty to the World Health Organization as an institution, its organs and its officers. I will profess openly my loyalty to the Director-General, Dr. Brundtland, and my commitment to assist her in the discharge of the duties that pertain to her office. I will do everything I can to ensure that the global mandates and the collective commitments of the world’s health authorities are carried out in that part of the world for which I have some charge. I accept my responsibility for the actions to be taken by the World Health Organization to improve the health of the people of the Americas.

I have no doubt or concern about the seamless compatibility of those two groups of responsibilities, although the weight of the latter is heavier. As I have stated to many of you individually and collectively, I view the diversity of our Organization as a strength.

I make no secret of the fact that I count myself blessed to be the Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and simultaneously the Regional Director of the World Health Organization. Experience has shown me and my colleagues very clearly that this duality is of

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

** **Address of Dr. George A. O. Alleyne to the 103rd Session of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization, on his reelection as Regional Director for the Americas of the World Health Organization. Geneva, Switzerland, 25 January-3 February 1999.**

inestimable benefit to the people of the Americas and, we wish to believe, to the people of the world as well.

The past four years have convinced me, if I needed convincing, of the importance of holding on high the ambitious and audacious goal of Health For All. It will continue to be our battle cry if you wish, and we will continue to see that the essence, the crux, the pith of that goal is that there should be more social justice as expressed in health equity. That search for equity in health perhaps resonates more in our Region which has the dubious distinction of being the most inequitable. Our focus on equity will go hand in hand with the joint efforts of our countries to deepen and strengthen the Pan American approach that has its roots in our geography and our history and is often shown in the solidarity of response to the natural disasters that strike from time to time.

This concern for equity is not a mere theoretical postulate. We believe that we can transform it into a framework for much of our technical cooperation. But first we must establish that there is inequality. Our cooperation must assist countries in identifying the unacceptable gaps and apply the interventions that are targeted towards the determinants of health that are inequitably distributed. Our technical cooperation with our countries will be based on the Strategic and Programmatic Orientations that have been approved for our work and which encompass fully the priorities that have been determined for global action.

We will be vigilant as regards the political currents that affect our work, always avoiding scrupulously involvement in the political processes themselves, but paying keen attention to the factors that influence political decision. We will do our utmost to achieve and maintain the technical excellence our countries have the right to expect from us. It is axiomatic that we will maintain the fiscal propriety and transparency that should characterize every public organization like ours. And for all of this to be possible, I will count on the continued support of the excellent staff to whom I owe so much.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board, you may think that my approach is Utopian, but as Oscar Wilde said, "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at."

Thank you.