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Director, PAHO
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**ADDRESS OF THE DIRECTOR OF PAHO
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF V COHEFA
(Washington, D.C.)**

Your Excellency, Dr. Juan Carlos Wasmosy, President of the Republic of Paraguay, Ministers of Agriculture, Representatives of the livestock and farming communities, ladies and gentlemen.

The subregional approach to the control of foot-and-mouth disease was viewed by the Ministers of Agriculture as a hemispheric strategy. Many of you will recall the formation of this Committee. In 1987, in response to the recommendation of Resolution XIII of the V Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Animal Health, the Hemispheric Committee for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (COHEFA) was created, with the principal objective of ensuring the sustained political commitment of the governments of the Region to eradicating foot-and-mouth disease in the Hemisphere.

In promoting the idea of this Committee, the ministers were also seeking greater integration and joint efforts to achieve the goal of eradicating foot-and-mouth disease and thus strengthening the animal health infrastructure in the Region. In the 5 years since the formation of the Committee, great progress has been achieved in the eradication of this disease--an effort that the authorities and producers, as well as other interested social actors, have carried out with ongoing technical support from PAHO through PANAFTOSA. Today, Chile, Guyana, Suriname, and Uruguay in South America are free of foot-and-mouth disease, and Argentina and the southern states of Brazil are without clinical cases. Other areas identified as disease-free are Patagonia in Argentina, the northwest region of Colombia, and French Guiana. But the battle is far from won and our success so far must not lead to a diminution of efforts. Today we face two main challenges. The first is to guarantee the status of the areas that were already disease-free or that have become disease-free. The other, strongly related to this, is the need to define, in the shortest time possible, in each country and region, the most appropriate ways of providing veterinary services--ways that involve the participation of all the social actors in the agricultural and livestock sector.

The programs for the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease, whose advances and successes will be discussed at this meeting, have demonstrated the effectiveness of joint efforts between the public and the private sectors when an adequate epidemiological approach has been utilized along with the promotion of local animal health committees. Here, collaboration between health and agriculture is clearly manifested, facilitated by the field activities to control and/or eradicate foot-and-mouth disease.

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

The effort to reduce the areas affected by foot-and-mouth disease will lead to significant progress in the opening of new markets to the Hemisphere's products of animal origin, thus helping to improve free trade and comply with the recommendations issued by the institutions charged with regulating international trade, such as the World Trade Organization and the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The progress achieved in the Southern Cone through the joint efforts of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay, through the River Plate Basin Project, has made it possible to begin risk analysis studies for the export of fresh boneless or frozen meat to both the Caribbean and the United States of America.

The future of animal health activities, especially the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease targeted for the year 2008, will increasingly demand cooperative efforts between the public and private sectors, as well as among the international agencies responsible for technical cooperation in this field. It is in this context that I must refer to the technical cooperation of the Pan American Health Organization through the Pan American foot-and-mouth Disease Center, located in Rio de Janeiro. This cooperation is geared towards assisting countries in organizing, programming, executing and evaluating of national projects as well as stimulating the development of subregional projects. We are proud of the work that this Center has carried out and continues to carry out especially in development of methods for epidemiologic surveillance, diagnosis and vaccine development. The work of this Center is a good demonstration of the success of the strategy of locating a group of experts from different disciplines in one place to focus scientific effort on a problem of major importance.

I hope that the Committee will be pleased with the results that you have obtained and you will strengthen your resolve to continue along the lines you have established. Perhaps one of the most impressive achievements has been to secure the political commitment of governments and the commitment of the non-governmental sectors at the highest level. The eradication of a disease such as foot-and-mouth disease will be yet another indication of the capacity of our countries to work together to achieve common goals.

I can promise that you will continue to have the full support of the Pan American Health Organization.

It is now an honour and a pleasure for me to invite his Excellency, the President of the Republic of Paraguay, Dr. Juan Carlos Wasmosy to address you. President Wasmosy has demonstrated repeatedly his interest in the work of this Committee and there could be no more fitting person to declare open this V Regional Meeting of the Hemispheric Committee for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease.