



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Regional Office of the
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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The Director of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) has the pleasure of inviting you to be present as Drs. Jon Kim Andrus and Socorro Gross-Galiano take the oath of office as Deputy Director and Assistant Director of PAHO/WHO, respectively, on 2 December 2009 at 11:00 a.m. in conference room A, 525 23rd Street, NW, Washington, D.C.

This momentous occasion is also PAHO's 107th anniversary of its founding and we invite you to take part in the celebration to commemorate this day as well.

The Director of PAHO hopes you are able to join us on this important day for PAHO/WHO and wish Drs. Andrus and Gross-Galiano much success in all their endeavors.

The event will also be webcast at the following link:

<http://new.paho.org/webcasts>

Washington, D.C., 19 November 2009

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I take special pleasure in participating with you today as you induct exceptional people into two of PAHO's most vital positions. Both are well suited to assume their responsibilities for pioneering new initiatives and reinforcing PAHO's role as creator, leader and innovator. I congratulate you both but extend my special salutations to two long-time friends and respected colleagues -- Jon Andrus and Socorro Gross.

Being invited to join you today in this special event is an honor. There is no group in public health for whom I have a greater respect and appreciation than those in PAHO. The accomplishments of PAHO and its member countries are many but, to me, the most remarkable was the transformation of the world's acceptance for disease prevention through immunization-- and thereby the importance of prevention to health.

PAHO in its century of service has contributed uniquely to the building of bridges of cooperation and consensus between countries. These are continuing to strengthen and expand. What other part of the world has succeeded in undertaking the cooperative ventures that you have achieved in this region? Thus, my special appreciation for having been asked to serve for nearly 20 years with the TAG (Technical Advisory Group) on immunization. I don't believe I saw every country in Latin America during that time but I certainly saw many. What was most encouraging to me was to interact with a young, always underpaid, but enthusiastic group. They continually dazzled me with their achievements despite the most difficult of circumstances. I was so impressed that I actually devoted many evenings trying to gain some comprehension of Spanish. I regret that it was a futile quest that finally had to be abandoned -- to everybody's relief.

Just over 30 years ago, the World Health Assembly took up the challenge of eradicating smallpox. It was then the most feared of all the pestilential diseases. Most doubted that it could be done. The available budget was too small even to pay for the vaccine that was needed. With WHO's urging, country after country took action. Some resisted; pressure from neighboring countries was sometimes needed; our WHO staff not infrequently intervened; and sometimes the Director-General himself was required to persuade Ministers and Heads of State. The program steadily grew in strength and momentum albeit with distressingly little growth in international assistance funds. When the program began, more than one billion people lived in the endemic countries. Ten years later there were none. It was a major undertaking but few, even today,

realize that at no time did the total of WHO staff and all bilateral advisers together number more than 150. Bottom line – it was the countries themselves who carried the burden and, as they did so, leaders began to appreciate their own national capacities for leadership and for executing program strategies. Other programs have followed.

No where in the world were the implications of the achievement of smallpox eradication better understood than in PAHO. With the catalytic leadership of Ciro de Quadros, Jon Andrus, Gina Tambini and their able staffs plus three very supportive regional directors, Carlyle Macedo, Mirta Rosas, and Georges Alleyne, the Expanded Program on Immunization grew to become a force for disease prevention unparalleled in history. Few today appreciate the extent and importance of that revolution nor the fact that it was PAHO that was the global leader and showed the way. It is clear that more can be done with community mobilization, imagination – and a healthy dose of young leaders who say – “let’s get the job done, to heck with the bureaucratic obstructions”

To PAHO – Happy 107th birthday – may you have many more!