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United States of America

**INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE
CONTROL COMMISSION**

CICAD

Organization of American States

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**BRIEF SPEECH
DR. MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO
PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

Brief Speech during the
51st Session of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD)

Dr. Mirta Roses Periago

May 9, 2012, 9:45 a.m.

Organization of American States (OAS)

1889 F Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20006

Mr. José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States
Ambassador Paul Simons, Executive Secretary of CICAD;
Mr. Rafael Bielsa, President of CICAD;
Representatives of the Delegations participating in the 51st Regular Session of CICAD

We are here today in a moment of enormous historical importance for the field of drug policy in the Americas. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Organization of American States (OAS) have united to sign a Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation in Demand Reduction, to benefit our countries through a more coordinated technical cooperative approach based on strategies approved by our Directive Bodies, and focused on human rights, public health, and scientific evidence.

There is no single solution for the drug problem and our Organizations have recognized that to make real progress, a complementary balance is necessary between supply reduction and demand reduction policies, according to national needs and realities, to protect and promote public health. Health is a fundamental right that should be at the center of all public policies, including policies on illicit drugs.

The signing of this Memorandum comes at a time when world drug policies, particularly those of our region, are being reviewed in various forums and capturing the attention of governments, leaders, experts, and civil society, who agree on the need to critically analyze and address the issues of drug supply and use, and its consequences for the population.

We have the duty, assigned by our Directive Bodies, to provide scientific information on this subject, to present country experiences and results, and to share the development of methodologies for objective analysis, thereby making it easier for governments to make more grounded decisions.

Only through broad and informative debate can innovative ideas be generated and evaluated. Although we do not have many solutions, if we have the tools—the scientific method and principals of public health—we will be able to seek and learn through systematic testing of new experiences and alternatives.

PAHO has been working with intense focus on the drugs most responsible for damage caused to public health in our region: tobacco and alcohol. From this we have gained valuable experience that may be used to guide discussions on illicit drugs from a public health perspective; we now know that they share risk factors and the same public health principles. Undoubtedly, the approach and coordination of work between our Organizations facilitates the integration of these issues, an approach already taken by many countries in the region.

The Memorandum we signed today includes the design and implementation of a Joint Regional Program, through which CICAD and PAHO propose to establish a mechanism for cooperation with Member States in the areas of institutional strengthening, training, and technical assistance. Activities for this will be outlined in an Annual Plan aimed at developing public health policies on drugs, strengthening the capacity of human resources and services provided, implementing an information system, and developing research and methodologies to analyze the impact of policies, programs, and interventions.

The development of a regional program between CICAD and PAHO compliments and reinforces our respective mandates on the issue of drugs. Through this program, we translate our intentions of strengthened technical cooperation on national and regional levels, and that is capable of being evaluated and with indicators that may be measured.

The time is right and encourages us to be optimistic about the progress that will come from this joint initiative between PAHO and CICAD; however, its success is not guaranteed and the good intentions of both organizations is not enough. It is necessary that the interest shown by Member State governments, cooperating partners, and representatives of the diverse sectors of society, translates into strong political support and resources that provide support to the Joint Regional Program, allowing for the program's objectives to be achieved.

PAHO, through his joint initiative with CICAD/OAS, reaffirms its commitment to protecting the right to health and other related human rights of people affected by disorders due to substance abuse, by making itself available to countries of the region, to support efforts towards the improvement of health and the living conditions of its inhabitants.

Thank you.