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**STATEMENT BY PAHO**

## STATEMENT BY PAHO

Distinguished Chair and Delegates of the 46th Regular Session of CICAD:

On behalf of Dr. Mirta Roses, Director of the Pan American Health Organization, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share with you some of the main aspects of our work with alcohol and drug use as they relate to the health of the peoples of the Americas.

The PAHO, in addition to acknowledging the devastating effects that alcohol and drug use have on individuals' health, pays great attention to its undeniable role as a contributing factor in the emergence of risk behaviors that impact families and communities. Injuries, violence, sexually transmitted diseases, and infections carried by the blood are some of the public health problems that can be strongly linked to alcohol and drug use.

In its role as a health agency, PAHO channels its actions toward both preventing the use of substances that affect individual health and tackling risks and harm with a negative impact on community welfare. For example, alcohol use can be recognized as a leading factor in the hidden epidemic that is domestic violence. Injuries caused by careless driving are also frequently associated with the consumption of alcohol, and they are a frequent cause of death among adolescents and young adults.

The transmission of infections such as hepatitis B and C and HIV among intravenous drugs users can be prevented through determined public health approaches aimed at damage control and at containing the spread of those infectious agents. Programs to promote safer sex are, essentially, efforts that reduce the risk of exposure to sources of infection transmitted during sexual relations, which have a disproportionate impact on drug users – whether they use syringes or not – who frequently provide sexual services in exchange for drugs or money.

Early this year, the English-language version of the document “Unhappy Hours: Alcohol and Partner Violence in the Americas” was published. Due to uncontrollable circumstances, the Spanish version has been postponed until the first months of 2011. In any event, this publication was officially launched at PAHO on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on December 4, 2008.

Between May 6 and 8, 2009, in São Paulo, Brazil, PAHO and the WHO organized a regional consultation on the global strategy for reducing alcohol abuse. Delegates from 26 of the region's ministries of health attended the meeting and made important contributions on the topics that this strategy should address, including regional priorities. The final report of this consultation can be found on the web pages of PAHO and of the WHO.

On October 8, another informal consultation was held with member states in Geneva, with the aim of discussing progress with the development of the strategy and seeking to build consensus regarding the immediate actions to be undertaken.

The Government of Sweden sponsored a meeting of experts – in conjunction with the WHO – on alcohol, social development, and health. This event was followed by a WHO world meeting on research priorities in the fields of alcohol, health, and poverty. Among the recommendations of this meeting were the topics of alcohol and HIV, alcohol and tuberculosis, fetal alcohol syndrome and related complaints, and research into the implementation of alcohol-related policies. PAHO will help carry out and coordinate research activities in these areas over the coming two years.

In January 2010, the preliminary version of the strategy will be submitted to the WHO Executive Board for its approval. If approved, the strategy will be presented to the World Health Assembly in May 2010.

As regards other drugs, PAHO is concluding a regional epidemiological report on drug use in LAC. The report combines data from studies published by scientific journals, CICAD, UNODC, and others gathered by consultants hired by PAHO itself. This report will provide a general overview of the region and enable targeted recommendations to be made from a public health perspective.

The publication *Drug Policy and the Public Good*, written by a group of international researchers who provide copious amounts of evidence-based information, is being launched by the Oxford University Press and PAHO. In addition, PAHO will be responsible for the Spanish version, scheduled for publication in mid-2010.

PAHO held a meeting of experts in October to identify knowledge gaps regarding drug use the factors determining users' health, and their social surroundings, and to review best practices in damage control, particularly as regards the transmission of HIV and other blood-based or sexually transmitted pathogens. Indeed, the interventions for preventing HIV transmission that the literature indicates as being most effective are those that aim at reducing risks among drug users. In line with PAHO's strategy of focusing its efforts on the most at-risk and dispossessed sectors of the population, work with drug users is an imperative in which damage control strategies are an essential component of comprehensive programs intended to improve their health and living conditions.

Within this same strategic framework, a series of algorithms have been developed or are being produced, targeting such population segments as MSM, sex workers, and transgendered individuals, among whom the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are prevalent.

Finally, in 2010, the PAHO secretariat will present its Directing Council with a regional strategy for reducing substance abuse and related problems. We have the invaluable collaboration of CICAD for preparing it and subsequently implementing it, and we once again thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation.