

**Presentation of Dr. Carissa Etienne, Director  
Pan American Health Organization  
Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization  
To the annual General Meeting of  
The Association of Former PAHO/WHO Staff Members (AFSM)  
Washington, DC, 9 December 2021**

**Esteemed colleagues of the Association of Former PAHO/WHO Staff Members.**

**Very good morning to you all. Thank you for inviting me to participate in your Annual Meeting. Although I will not be able to join your session, I do not want to miss the opportunity to be part of this important event.**

**As you know, next year PAHO will celebrate its 120th anniversary and I would like us to reflect for a moment on such an important milestone.**

**In 2022 we all, current and former staff members, will be commemorating PAHO's 120 years of contribution to the health of the peoples of the Americas. We will celebrate the Organization's major accomplishments, achievements that you have contributed to and sacrificed for. Over its 119 years of existence, many have shaped and sustained this Organization, through hard work, commitment, and dedication. We stand on your shoulders as we continue to adapt and grow to higher heights, always with a firm focus on the health and well-being of all the peoples of the Americas and rooted in our foundation principles of equity and solidarity.**

**We must constantly reflect on the changing context of our work, the opportunities, and challenges with an eye to remaining the premier public health agency in the Americas.**

**You know that 2020 and 2021 brought unprecedented difficulties for PAHO, the COVID-19 pandemic being one of them; however, our long history has made us resilient. PAHO was able to support our Member States to respond to the worst pandemic in 100 years, serving with excellence, vision, and the indomitable spirit that characterizes PAHO staff over the years. We partnered far and wide and advocated ceaselessly for the Regions needs eg equitable access to vaccines, supplies and other technology.**

**The organization gained the respect of governments inside and outside the Region and is well recognized in the regional and international arena. Through it all we remained fully engaged, transparent and neutral. I continue to be grateful to the staff, who gave their best under trying circumstances.**

**I can proudly inform you that PAHO has retained its positioning as the lead public health organization in the Americas.**

**But this is not new:**

**“Over the almost 120 years of PAHO's existence the Organization has remained relevant, adapting to changing circumstances” and seeking opportunities to “build back better and fairer”. History is made of experience and learning, and the Association of Former Staff Members represents the legacy of the Organization; your knowledge, contributions and participation in the organizational life has made PAHO what it is now and what it will be**

**in the future. PAHO recognizes the contributions of the former staff members and strives for ensuring that their well-deserved benefits are maintained and accessible to all retirees.**

**Let me congratulate the active leadership of the association. The Organization is committed to supporting the initiatives of the Association and has collaborated with the creation of a platform for the virtual communication of retirees. Furthermore, as a result of my meeting with Ms. Gloria Coe, President of the Association, the Office of the Legal Counsel is working on the agreement which will ensure a clear understanding of the Organization's support for the activities of the Association.**

**The Organization's most important asset is its staff, current and former staff members deserve recognition for their commitment and determination. All of us throughout our professional life have adapted to new ways of working, learned new technology and more recently embraced virtuality. All of us are part of the PAHO's history and we should feel proud of it.**

**I wish you happy holidays and a healthy and blessed 2022.**