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WORLD HEALTH DAY 1995
HRC REMARKS

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World Health Day 1995
Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton
First Lady of the United States

Thank you very much, Dr. Alleyne, and all of you who are gathered here today.

I know that you've already had an excellent program. I know some of the speakers who've already addressed you and the work they have done over decades on behalf of children and, in particular, on behalf of immunization.

I am pleased to be here with all of you on World Health Day. This marks a historic opportunity for all nations to come together to work to improve the health of our global family.

I also want to thank all of you here at PAHO who are on the frontlines every day promoting better health throughout our hemisphere.

I agree completely with Dr. Alleyne that you are the real champions of children and it is your work every single day, your persistence in many instances-- your begging, your challenging, your promoting the idea that every child, every person is entitled to health care, that really makes what we are now celebrating with the eradication of polio in this hemisphere a reality.

Nothing is more important to our shared future than the well-being of children and for that reason I am especially pleased that children are the focus of this year's World Health Day. As you may know, I just returned yesterday from a 10-day trip to South Asia, where I saw firsthand some of the world's greatest health challenges and also some of the most innovative, thoughtful methods of bringing better health care to children and women in poor and remote

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areas. For me, that trip was an inspiring reminder of how much progress can be made when the will and commitment are there to help those in need.

Today's world is one of great promise for the 130 million children of our own hemisphere. Great promise, because our children are obviously our lifeline to prosperity and progress in the exciting and unpredictable century that lies ahead.

Great promise because there are millions of healthy children across the Americas, whose future are filled with hope and great promises because of historic commitments born at the the Summit of the Americas las December, commitments that will translate into greater opportunity and justice for all children.

Among other initiatives, government leaders endorsed the goal of making basic health services available to all citizens. That will be extremely beneficial to children, who are the most vulnerable to illnesses and unhealthy living conditions. I also want to commend the first ladies who participated in this symposium on children in Miami and worked with Dr. Alleyne to clarify our common vision and goals.

Today these women across the Americas are turning rhetoric into reality by helping launch PAHO's historic campaign to eliminate measles from our hemisphere by the year 2000. Later this year many of these women will convene in Paraguay to review our efforts and share our experiences in working to meet this goal. The campaign to eliminate measles is vital to all of our futures. It will save the lives of countless children in every country and will bring primary health care to every single village in our hemisphere.

I say this with confidence because we know from past experience that it can be done. The Pan American Health Organization already has led the world in getting rid of the polio virus.

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Since the World Health Organization resolved to fight polio in 1988, the number of polio cases around the world has declined by 82%. Today, 145 countries are polio free and last year, as we already heard, the Americas became the first region in the world to be declared formally free of polio and not a single case has been detected in the region since August of 1991.

All of you here should take great pride in that achievement. You succeeded in getting many nations and private and public institutions involved and that is no small achievement.

Now the work must continue in other parts of the world and in our region we must turn our attention to another major health threat to children: measles. My husband often talks about children as the greatest resource of every nation and one of the best ways to build on that resource is to invest in children, especially their health.

And I would add and echo Dr. Alleyne's comments. When we talk about health and education for children, we're not talking about a soft issue, about a marginal issue. We are not talking about an issue that is the province of women. We are talking about a core issue that will determine the future of every one of our nations and this is an urgent mission, that we understand fully how significant the health of our children is to the future of all of us.

Because just as we live in a time of great promise for children, we also live in a time of great peril. More than 1/2 of the population in this hemisphere is under the age of 23 and too many of our young people in every one of our countries suffer from poverty, hunger, illiteracy and inadequate health care.

But the statistics need not be so grim. While ushering children into the world is the province of families, protecting them from avoidable diseases must be viewed as the shared responsibility of our larger human family. We all know that a sick child has much less chance

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of learning, growing and fulfilling his or her potential than a child who is healthy.

A sick child has much less reason to be hopeful and optimistic about the future, less likely to develop into a healthy, productive citizen. That is why it is our responsibility as a community of nations to insist that all children receive the health care they need. We have the technology. Vaccinations exist for most of the major childhood diseases and they are far cheaper than long term treatments or the disabilities that result when children become seriously ill.

All we need now is the commitment to make these immunization campaigns succeed. The United States has been a proud partner of past efforts to eliminate major childhood diseases in this hemisphere. Nearly half of all external donor funding for the polio campaign came from the United States Agency for International Development. The United States currently is providing nearly US\$7 million as part of our child survival programs in the countries of the Americas.

Today I am pleased to announce that the United States will join in partnership with PAHO in the campaign to eliminate measles across the hemisphere. PAHO has estimated that an additional US\$46 million is needed for immunization programs between now and the end of the century. Through USAID, the United States plans to extend a five-year, US\$20 million grant to PAHO to advance hemispheric health care priorities.

Although the United States, like many other nations, is operating under budget constraints, our government hopes to allocate US\$8 million directly to the Regional Expanded Program on Immunization, which includes support to the measles campaign. At the same time, we have every expectation that just as with the polio effort, USAID programs and technical support across the Americas will help boost the campaign to eliminate measles.

During the polio campaign those programs more than doubled our regional commitment. One

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of the most important aspects of PAHO's campaign to eliminate measles is that it will advance all of our immunization efforts.

Perhaps equally important, it does reflect a larger vision of health reform that extends a basic package of integrated health services throughout the region and in that way carries forward the Summit of the Americas plan of action.

It also provides us through this measles campaign continuing opportunities for surveillance throughout the region so that we do remain very much focused on how effective we are in delivering immunization services. We have succeeded with respect to polio, but we must remain vigilant as to that disease and all others. Although our specific health challenges may differ from country to country, and our recipes for progress may require different ingredients, we share a common future and a common cause: we must not work in isolation to solve our problems, whether we are health organizations, NGOs, government leaders, private citizens we must join together as partners who appreciate the value of sharing our knowledge and experience and we must remember that when it comes to helping our children words alone are not enough, policy papers are not enough, press releases are not enough, documents and studies are not enough. We have had more than our share of each.

Instead, we must translate into action what we can do and then get on with the business of doing it.

Ultimately, we must be guided by a desire in our hearts to see that all children have the gift of hope in their lives. As the wonderful Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral once wrote "Many things we need can wait, the child cannot." And so today, as we celebrate this very important effort, I hope each of us will remember that the child cannot wait and we can do something to

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ensure that the child throughout this hemisphere has the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential.

Thank you very much.