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REPORT OF THE MEETING OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH OF THE AMERICAS ON VIOLENCE AND INJURY PREVENTION

Introduction

1. The first Meeting of Ministers of Health of the Americas on Violence and Injury Prevention, convened by the Secretary of Health of Mexico and the Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB), was held on 14 March 2008 in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico. A Declaration signed by the ministers or their representatives emanated from this Meeting. The content of the Declaration is being presented to the Executive Committee for review and discussion.

2. Two other meetings on the same topic were consecutively convened in the same city: the Second Global Meeting of Ministry of Health Focal Points for this area (13 and 14 March), convened by the World Health Organization, and the 9th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion (15 to 18 March), organized by the National Institute of Public Health of Mexico.

3. This report focuses on the first meeting and outlines with the other two through the clear linkage between the topics and the potential commitments for PAHO and the countries of the Americas as a result of these meetings. It concludes with an analysis and along with a request to the Executive Committee.

The Problem¹

4. Nearly 110,000 homicides and 55,000 suicides are recorded in the Americas on an annual basis. More than 12 countries in the Region have double digits homicide rates

¹ Data taken from *Health in the Americas, 2007*, Pan American Health Organization, Washington, D.C. or from the following web page: http://www.cenapra.salud.gob.mx/interior/ministros_2.html.

per 100,000 population. This situation has been deemed critically complex the achievement of success in violence prevention. Lack of road safety has led to the deaths of nearly 130,000 people in the Americas. An estimated 1,200,000 people suffer injuries, and many of them remain disabled for life as a result of violence or injuries sustained on streets and roadways.

5. Studies conducted in the countries of the Region have shown that women are frequent victims of intrafamily violence, being physical, sexual, by negligence or psychological. Children also suffer violence from those closest to them. Surveys have estimated that these forms of violence occur in some 20% to 60% of households,. Many of these cases go unreported out of fear in cultures that tolerate violence or because of a lack of faith that there will be a timely, adequate response on the part of governments and institutions.

6. It is important to recognize that even though practically all the countries of the Americas have laws, agreements, and national and international conventions and institutions specifically to protect women and children, when women and children have been victims of violence, these laws or standards have not been adequately enforced.

7. Hundreds of youths in the Americas have joined violent gangs, and although they represent an absolute minority of young people, the acts of juvenile gangs in several countries of the Region are considered to be a social problem with significant repercussions for society as a whole.

8. Violence and the lack of street and road safety have been recognized as a public health problem in the Americas. A number of documents, reports, and resolutions by the United Nations, the World Health Assembly, and the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization have presented evidence of the magnitude of the problem and have issued recommendations for preventing violence on streets and roadways. They urge governments to adopt public policies geared to its prevention.

9. In several countries in the hemisphere, the ministries of health have also recognized that violence and lack of road safety are major public health problems. The heavy medical, social, and economic costs stemming from these causes are part of the desire in the Region to put preventative plans and programs in place, thereby diminishing their social, human, and institutional burden.

The Ministerial Meeting

10. The first ministerial meeting of the Americas on this issue was convened due to the need to join forces and clearly define the role of the health sector.

Objectives

- To create a forum for modifying and strengthening the role of the Ministries of Health of the Americas in the definition and implementation of public policies and strategies geared to the prevention and treatment of injuries from external causes;
- To strengthen the role of the health sector and recognize the need for intersectoral cooperation at the national and international levels;
- To strengthen cooperation among countries, with the common objective of prevention;
- To provide evidence to the attendees of the 9th World Conference on the commitment of the Ministries of Health to prevent injuries from external causes.

Implementation

11. The meeting was declared opened by the Governor of Yucatán and chaired by the Federal Secretary of Health of Mexico and the Director of PASB. The list of ministers and participating delegates is attached as Annex I.

12. The agenda included presentations that provided an overview of the global and regional problem and described the following experiences in the health sector which have led to progress toward the commitment to violence prevention and safety promotion on streets and roadways².

- Argentina: Drafting of national legislation on road safety;
- Brazil: Public policies to reduce violence in Brazil;
- Colombia: PREVIVA, a successful experience in creating a public policy to promote social harmony;
- Costa Rica: Prevention of violence and injuries, a culture of peace in child centers;
- El Salvador: Information system on injuries from external causes (SILEX);
- United States of America: Prevention of falls: moving from research to action;
- The Violence Prevention Alliance in Jamaica; and

² Available on request or at the following site: http://www.cenapra.salud.gob.mx/interior/ministros_2.html.

- Mexico: National Program to combat domestic and gender violence.
- Presentations will be published in a volume of proceedings with the consent of the Ministry of Health of Mexico and funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

13. During the ministerial meeting, it was shown that interest in preventing violence and promoting safety on streets and roadways has gained ground in the Americas. This was evident from the high degree of participation in this meeting and the other held in Mérida during 13 and 18 March 2008. The Ministers or their representatives emphasized:

- the need to focus the work on the causes and risk factors of injuries, and not just on their effects;
- the special effort that should be made through primary prevention, without neglecting the health sector's role in providing high-quality care to victims during the acute stages of injuries and recovery periods;
- their recognition that injuries caused by violence and traffic accidents, whether or not fatal, receive the most public attention and create the greatest burden on the health services;
- that the high prevalence of domestic violence, especially against women and children, has a serious impact on the health and development of these victims, physical, sexual, or psychological in nature or due to neglect;
- the need to improve information systems and identify the circumstances under which injuries occur;
- the need to investigate the causes and not just the effects of violence and traffic injuries, and their related cost;
- the desirability and need for support among countries, with the expectation that those that have made greater progress and have had more positive experiences will share them with their regional neighbors.

*Ministerial Declaration on Violence and Injury Prevention in the Americas*³

14. The Declaration is the most important technical-political outcome of the meeting and is considered a step forward in the commitments of the Ministries of Health. It emphasizes the need for continued technical support from the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization, whilst it simultaneously seeks to maintain

³ The Declaration in English and Spanish is attached.

the production and distribution of documents that contribute to the prevention of violence and the promotion of road safety.

Second Global Meeting of Focal Points of Ministers of Health

15. Sixty-two people from 50 countries, including 21 from the Americas, attended the meeting.

16. The main objective of this meeting was to strengthen mechanisms to support the work of focal points in the ministries of health.

17. Technical personnel noted the need for training and networks to share information as key strategies.

18. The joint convocation of the two technical meetings of focal points and political players with the ministerial meeting optimized the results of both meetings and will facilitate the fulfillment of the commitments made in the Declaration signed.

Ninth World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, 15 to 18 March 2008

19. The 9th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion was organized by the National Public Health Institute (INSP) and the Center for Population Health Research (CISP) of Mexico. This was the first time that this biennial event was held in a Latin American country.

20. The Conference was declared opened by the Governor of Yucatán, the Minister of Health of Mexico, and the Director of the PASB, who spoke on behalf of the Director-General of WHO. These participants and ministers from the Region, later announced that the Ministerial Declaration had been signed the previous day.

Objectives

21. The objectives of the 9th Conference were:

- To call attention to the need for decisions to control and prevent violence and promote safety on streets and highways, with particular emphasis on the low- and middle-income countries;
- To work to put this issue on public agendas;

- To facilitate the exchange of updated scientific information on the areas covered during the Conference;
- To strengthen or promote networks of groups working on the areas covered during the Conference, and
- To provide Latin American and Caribbean organizations the opportunity to interact and network with other organizations from other regions of the world to strengthen and expand their research prospects.

22. The scientific program and discussions which 1,157 participants, 62% of whom were from the Americas, engaged in, laid the groundwork for action in violence prevention and safety promotion on streets and highways and the prevention of other types of injuries.

Action taken by PAHO since the Signature of the Ministerial Declaration

23. Dissemination of the Declaration. The Declaration was dispatched to each of the PAHO Representative Offices, international agencies that are members of the Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence, of which PAHO is a founding member, and to colleagues and networks interested in this issue.

24. Publication of the meeting's proceedings with the consent of Mexico's Secretariat of Health.

25. Sensitizing the ministers who did not attend the meeting in Mérida to learn about the contents of the Declaration and request that they sign it once they agree with its content.

26. Invitation dispatched by Ministries of Health and PAHO for a joint meeting of focal points to refine work plan and areas of responsibility to achieve short and medium term plans of action.

Relations among the three Mérida meetings

27. It is anticipated that the health sector's role in the prevention of violence and the promotion of street and road safety will be strengthened and modified if necessary, and that the action requested by communities will be intensified.

28. The ministerial meeting and the Declaration signed demonstrate interest in making greater commitments and moving toward the formulation of proposals on the topics discussed.

29. The objectives of the three meetings were achieved.

30. The ministerial meeting endorses and stimulates proposals and pays attention to the concerns of the Second Global Meeting of Ministry of Health Focal Points. Focal points are responsible for implementing the contents of the Declaration.

31. As discussed in several sessions of the 9th Conference and included in its objectives, the ministerial Declaration supports the inclusion of this issue on public agendas along with intersectoral action and networks. It also creates opportunities for scientific research on the causes, risk or protective factors, and social determinants of violence and lack of street and road safety.

Action by the Executive Committee

32. The Executive Committee is requested to review the Declaration and determine whether a resolution officially ratifying the Ministerial Declaration on Violence and Injury Prevention in the Americas, Mérida 14 March 2008, should be submitted to the 2008 Directing Council, so that it can become an official PAHO working instrument and a mandate for the Member States. If considered necessary, a draft Resolution is attached for the review of the Executive Committee.

Annex

**PARTICIPANTS IN THE MINISTERIAL MEETING ON
VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INJURIES IN THE AMERICAS
Mérida, Yucatán, México
14 March 2008**

Hon. John Maginley
Minister of Health
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Lic. Alberto Hernández
Secretario de Determinantes de la Salud y Relaciones Sanitarias
Argentina

Dr. Jorge Antonio Polanco Salazar
Director General de Servicios de Salud
Belice

Dr. Walter Selum Rivero
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Bolivia

Dr. Otaliba Libanio de Morais Neto
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Dr. Pedro Crocco Ábalos
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Dr. Germán González
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El Salvador

Dr. Luis Gabriel López Monterroso
Viceministro Administrativo
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Dr. Gabriel Thimothe
Director General del Ministério de Salud
Haiti

Dr. Carlos Aguilar
Viceministro de Salud
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Dr. Elizabeth Ward
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Dr. José Ángel Córdova Villalobos
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Hon. John Osborne
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**PARTICIPANTS IN THE MINISTERIAL MEETING ON
VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INJURIES IN THE AMERICAS** *(cont.)*

Hon. Dr. Rupert Emmanuel Herbert
Minister of Health & Environment
Saint Kitts and Nevis

Min. Keith Raymond Rufus Mondesir
Minister of Health
Saint Lucia

Hon. Dr. Celsius Waterberg
Minister of Health
Suriname

Senator Jerry Narace
Minister of Health
Trinidad and Tobago

Dr. Etienne Krug
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