



MEETING OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE AMERICAS (HEMA)

DECLARATION OF MAR DEL PLATA - June 17, 2005

We, the Ministers of Health and Environment of the Member States of the Organization of American States, gathered in the meeting of Mar del Plata, Argentina, in compliance with the agreement reached during the Summit of the Americas held in Quebec 2001, with the aim to strengthen our hemispheric alliance, to review progress made since our last meeting, and set directions for future actions aimed at achieving the improvement of the health and the environment conditions in the Region,

Complying with the mandate of the Special Summit of the Americas held in Monterrey in January 2004, as regards the instructions given to the Ministers of Health and Environment of the Americas (HEMA) to develop a cooperative agenda to prevent and minimize negative impacts on the environment and health;

Re-affirming the commitments, priorities and goals agreed to at the 1995 Pan American Conference on Health and Environment in Human Sustainable Development held in Washington, the Meeting of the Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas held in Ottawa in March 2002 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002;

Acknowledging that health conditions of the population depend on their interrelations with the physical and social environment in which they live, and also depend on the relationship between poverty, environmental quality and human health; Aware that eradication of poverty and overcoming inequality are the major challenges of the governments of the Region, and that they are crucial for the achievement of sustainable development;

Considering that the Millennium Declaration constitutes a priority in the agenda of our Region's countries, we are committed to contribute both at a national and regional level by means of a better integration of the actions addressed to achieve the goals;

Taking into account the theme selected for the Fourth Summit of the Americas: "Creating Employment to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance", to which the health and environmental issues are closely related;

Observing the progress made in the implementation of these commitments and acknowledging that there is still a lot to be done;

We declare

Cooperative Agenda

1. To advance a cooperative agenda focused on:
 - a) Action at a national level,
 - b) Regional cooperation on priority issues,
 - c) Provision of tools and resources for decision-makers,



d) Expansion of the participation of civil society organizations and major groups as defined in Agenda XXI.

Action at a National Level

2. We reiterate that the most important context for action is at a national level and, in this sense, we reaffirm our commitment to lead the efforts to strengthen and consolidate alliances between the Health and Environment Ministries and the sectors related to health and environment in our countries.
3. Further, we recognize the essential importance of the synergy developed by the coordination of efforts and actions with other government sectors with common or related areas of interests.
4. We commit ourselves to encourage public policies on sustainable development that endeavor to alleviate poverty and inequality, to protect the environment and public health in the framework of human rights.

Regional Cooperation on Priority Issues

5. We recognize that our countries are facing difficult and complex challenges related to the health and environmental areas. Our efforts, both at the regional and subregional levels, will be aimed at supporting the progress and achievement of the results on the following three priority issues:

a) Integrated Management of Water Resources and Solid Waste

Access to safe drinking water, hygiene and basic sanitation, and solid waste management services are critical factors for the protection of human health and are particularly important for the reduction of children's morbidity and mortality. We are committed to improving such access, as well as to promote Integrated Solid Waste Management Systems.

b) Sound Management of Chemicals

We are committed to developing and implementing strategies to manage risks, reduce threats to ecosystems and to human health in our region from pesticides and other chemical substances, particularly with respect to vulnerable populations, including indigenous groups, industrial and agricultural workers, women and children. This will be done in compliance with the obligations contracted by countries under the Stockholm, Rotterdam and Basel Conventions.

c) Children's Environmental Health

We commit to improve the understanding of links between environmental quality and children's health, considering that children are particularly vulnerable throughout the different stages of their development. Similarly, we commit to continue and strengthen the actions aimed at the prevention of the adverse effects of the environment on children.

We also recognize the threats posed by the transmission of emerging and re-emerging diseases and commit ourselves to developing a better understanding of the conditions that give rise to them.



Provision of Tools and Resources for Decision-makers

6. We are committed to strengthening capacity and providing tools and resources that will assist decision-makers at national, sub-national, local and community levels to better link and integrate environment and health factors.

Expansion of the Participation of Civil Society Organizations and major groups as defined in Agenda XXI.

7. We reiterate our strong conviction regarding the importance of the role that Civil Society and major groups as defined in Agenda XXI must play in shaping national and regional action to mitigate and prevent threats to human health and the environment. We commit to expand their participation in this process.

Implementation of the Cooperative Agenda

8. We will concentrate our efforts on the implementation of the Cooperative Agenda by developing actions that cover environmental and health factors to solve priority problems, taking care of specificities proper of each nation, achieving closer technical cooperation and achieving exchanges of information among countries and within themselves.
9. In order to move forward on the Cooperative Agenda, the commitment of all the countries of the Region and the continued strong support of the associated partners is required, as well as additional financial resources. We look towards sub-regional, regional and global development banks and other financial institutions to provide the necessary support for the implementation of the Cooperative Agenda.
10. The HEMA Working Group will be in charge of the follow-up concerning the progress made in the cooperative agenda. To do so, we request the support of international financial institutions, organizations of regional and subregional integration as well as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/ROLAC), and the Organization of American States (OAS) in the context of their mandate.

We emphasize the need to give a new direction to the role and the Working Group functions according to the cooperative agenda, considering the need to expand the participation of the countries of the region.

Building Strategic Alliances

11. We commit to encourage the creation of alliances with the Ministries of Labor and Education and other Ministries to increase synergies in order to make progress towards the internationally agreed goals of the Millennium Declaration.

Final Messages

12. We acknowledge the importance of the actions that have been taken by the subregional organizations of countries to develop the commitments made at the Meeting of the Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas held in Ottawa in



March 2002, and we recognize this level as an important factor in the future implementation of the cooperative agenda.

13. We thank the participants of the civil society and major groups as defined in Agenda XXI for the coordination of the preparatory consultation work on the themes discussed , and for the contributions made to this meeting.
14. We urge PAHO, UNEP/ROLAC, and OAS, in the context of their mandates, and other development organizations and financial institutions at a national, regional and global level, to continue with the actions aimed at the contribution of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.
15. This meeting has given us the opportunity to renew and strengthen our commitment to improving the health and environment of our countrymen. We do believe that by formulating this Cooperative Agenda we will make progress in the development of the mandate derived from the process of the Summit of the Americas.
16. We commend Argentina to convey, on our behalf, the documents of this Meeting to all hemispheric leaders at the Fourth Summit of the Americas.
17. We thank the Government and the people of Argentina for their generosity and hospitality in hosting this meeting of Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas. We also thank all those who have, through their efforts, contributed to the success of this initiative.

Message to the Heads of State and Governments of the Americas

18. The Cooperative Agenda that we have approved will contribute to the improvement of the health and environment of our communities in our countries and region, with special emphasis on children. Similarly, it will allow us to improve hygiene and safety conditions at working places in the path towards sustainable development.
- 19 We ask our Heads of State and Government to take into account these proposals and support their development, in order to strengthen the synergies between health and environment sectors and the contribution of these sectors to the improvement of the quality of life in the Americas.



ANNEX COOPERATIVE AGENDA

At the regional and subregional level, and taking into account the capacities, the countries will focus their efforts on:

1. Integrated Management of Water Resources and Solid Waste

- Develop and implement water safety plans for the reduction of risks to human health.
- Implement and strengthen the systems of surveillance regarding the quality of water for human use and consumption.
- Promote the use of health and environmental impact assessments in water and waste infrastructure decision-making, including water and waste effluents treatment systems.
- Develop and implement integrated solid waste management systems.
- Develop ecosystem assessment projects between water resources and health.
- Develop and update country sectorial analysis for the implementation of intersectorial collaborative water and sanitation strategies.
- Develop and implement technological collaborative strategies for the prevention or reduction of the risks derived from water pollution.
- Promote the safe storage and treatment of drinking water at the point of use to reduce adverse health effects.
- Develop responses and knowledge with an ecosystems approach to water management to prevent and control communicable diseases.
- Incorporate science and technology into the formulation of integrated policies for water resources and solid waste management.
- Promote hygiene education programs as part of a broader strategy for the prevention of health risks associated with water.
- Promote and develop sustainable funding mechanisms for the management of water resources and solid waste with the aid of organizations and institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, etc.

2. Sound Management of Chemicals

- Support the implementation of national action plans for the reduction and elimination of persistent organic pollutants listed under the Stockholm Convention.
- Increase action to reduce the use and the emissions of mercury from chloralkali facilities, products containing mercury and artisanal gold mining through multi-stakeholders partnerships.



- Strengthen sub-regional and national actions to achieve a complete elimination of lead in gasoline and its reduction from other sources, and to decrease sulfur in gasoline and diesel.
- Strengthen knowledge and research on the effects of chemicals on human health and the environment.
- Establish and/or strengthen public access to information and knowledge of the adverse health and environmental effects as a result of the exposure to chemical substances.
- Develop and strengthen national systems of chemicals risk assessment.
- Control and assess the effects on health and the environment provoked or produced by the exposure to pesticides and heavy metals, particularly among vulnerable populations, in order to take actions for their mitigation.
- Promote the implementation of the Harmonized Global System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals.
- Promote the development and implementation of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registries.
- Strengthen the surveillance to prevent illegal trafficking of chemicals.
- Promote the development of prevention, preparation and rapid response systems in case of chemical emergencies.
- Strengthen programs of education and incentive for public participation, as part of a broad strategy for the prevention of health risks associated with chemicals.
- Promote and develop sustainable funding mechanisms for the management of chemicals with the aid of organizations and institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, etc.

3. Children's Environmental Health

- Strengthen the training with respect to children's environmental health at every level of health care.
- Strengthen programs of education and incentive for public participation, as part of a broad strategy for promoting children's environmental health.
- Incorporate the theme of children's environmental health into formal educational programs.
- Promote the organization of fora on children's environmental health , as well as incorporate this issue into other fora.
- Develop strategies for the implementation of initiatives on Children's Environmental Health.
- Promote cohort studies on the effects of pollution on children's health.
- Promote measures aimed at the reduction of environmental risks related to zoonotic diseases.



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- Promote the establishment and networking of pediatric environmental health specialty units.
- Strengthen capacities to recognize and manage poisoning in children derived from pesticides and other chemicals.