



PAHO Director Challenges Caribbean Journalists to Promote Millennium Development Goals

The Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Dr. Mirta Roses Periago challenged Caribbean journalists to use their influence to promote the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as “a road map to the development of the region.”

The Director’s challenge came while addressing the 11th PAHO/Caribbean Awards presentation function at the Grand Barbados Beach Resort on Friday, November 7, 2003. A total of 16 awards and Certificates of Merit were presented to media practitioners from around the region for exemplary work in health journalism from June 2002 to May 2003.

Dr. Roses told the practitioners that the vast reach of the media into the lives of our communities make them formidable allies in health promotion, adding that collaboration over the years has proven to be effective in advocating many health causes such as tobacco control, breast cancer promotion and environmental protection. In addressing the Millennium Development Goals, she affirmed their importance, stating that their achievement meant improving the health and quality of life of the poor, which is a fundamental goal of economic development. “While there have been achievements, differences and disparities exist between countries, and several are lagging behind,” she said. She pointed out that the region is one of the most affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and there has been a resurgence of tuberculosis and a rise in obesity and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Dealing with the goal of combating HIV/AIDS, she said that this pandemic “represents a unique challenge of unprecedented urgency and intensity” that can undermine development in the region for this and future generations. Hence the importance of implementing effective prevention and treatment programmes

She lauded Barbados for the practical and comprehensive approach to the epidemic, noting that these efforts have already reaped some success. She, however, encouraged the countries to do more to promote prevention and eliminate stigma and discrimination against those affected with the virus.

The Director pledged PAHO’s continued support in improving the health systems of the region, and in providing technical guidance; also in negotiating for cheaper anti-retroviral drugs. She



however affirmed that the governments must assign efficient managers to monitor and evaluate their programmes to ensure that they realize returns on their investments in HIV/AIDS programmes. “It is not adequate just to provide drugs, we must use our best efforts to develop programmes to address prevention, reduce stigma and discrimination,” she stressed.

Dr. Roses also said that the region must provide the means and services to interact with those in prison and those who are “commercially engaged in sex” as well as our young people between 15 and 24 who are proving to be the more vulnerable members of our populations. She explained that while it is difficult to control illegal acts such as homosexuality and prostitution, more information must be accessible in order for policy makers and the wider public to make informed decisions such as introducing solutions which include legalizing prostitution and homosexuality. “We are committed to the concept of health as a social product and therefore, any disease, or unsafe behaviour, is a risk to the whole society,” she emphasized. The Director then called on all media practitioners in the Caribbean to use the channels of communications accessible to them to ensure that the region remains on stream for achieving the MGDs.

Following her address, Dr. Roses presented a PAHO Centennial plaque to noted Barbadian calypsonian, Brian ‘Bumba’ Payne, for his work in promoting health through music. The entertainer’s name was published on the list of PAHO Health Champions during 2002, when the organization celebrated its Centennial, and the Director used the event in Barbados to formally recognize his effort and to laud his accomplishments.

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November 10, 2003

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