

**Regional Ministerial Meeting on HIV and Development in Latin America and the
Caribbean**

**2009 Annual Ministerial Review of the
Economic and Social Council**

Jamaica, 4-6 June 2009

Statement by Laura López, Secretary of the Commission
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Her Excellency Ambassador Sylvie Lucas, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council,
Honourable Rudyard Spencer, Minister of Health of Jamaica,
Honourable Andrew Holness, Minister of Education of Jamaica,
Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to join my colleagues from the United Nations, in thanking the Government of Jamaica for hosting the Regional Ministerial Meeting on HIV and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This important event comes at a time when the world is facing a severe financial and economic crisis, which will adversely affect all aspects of economic and social development, including of course, public health. As a result, the prospects for achieving the Millennium Development Goals seem dim, and require greater efforts from all parties, including Government, civil society, the private sector and the international community. Therefore, we salute the representatives of these stakeholders who are present at this meeting.

While our region has, by and large, demonstrated a significant level of commitment and leadership in addressing the HIV epidemic, there is now a real threat that this level of effort may not be sustainable. Even before the crisis, increasing spending on health and expanding coverage to overcome the problem of segregated access to health-care services, were major challenges for health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. Now, with public resources ever scarcer, these needs are becoming even more crucial.

We acknowledge how difficult it is for most countries in the region to maintain the previous levels of social spending, but we must emphasize that in addition to being the most redistributive of social public expenditures, spending on health is also countercyclical and helps to stimulate economic development, productivity and prosperity.

At ECLAC, we have been closely monitoring the impact of the international financial and economic crisis on the region's economies, and the measures adopted in response by Governments in various countries. We will have the chance to look at this further tomorrow. What I would like to emphasize today is that economic growth by itself, without appropriate

policies to ensure reasonable fairness in benefit distribution, and without social protection systems, contributes little to health equity. This is why we look forward to the debates in this meeting on the alternatives that would enable Governments in the region to deal with constraints without sacrificing health services, particularly for the most vulnerable sectors of society.

Ladies and gentlemen:

From an institutional point of view, this meeting has provided us with the chance to address the only Millennium Development Goal that we have not yet analysed in depth. As you may be aware, since the year 2005 and in conjunction with all United Nations agencies working in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC has been monitoring progress towards these Goals. The intention is not merely to review progress, but also to put forward, through annual regional inter-agency reports, the elements of a systematic, integrated and shared vision of the Goals as a development agenda.

Last year, with the support of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF), we produced the report entitled *Millennium Development Goals: Progression towards the right to health in Latin America and the Caribbean*. In that report, we reviewed progress, obstacles and policy recommendations for the other health-related Goals, that is, child mortality and maternal health and their determinants, including poverty, undernutrition and hunger.

We trust that the debates on the progress and challenges in the response to the HIV pandemic and its interconnection with regional public health, together with the exchanges of good practices that will take place at this meeting, will complement the work already done on health and the Millennium Development Goals.

Two final thoughts I would like to share with you this morning: first, promoting public health is not only the responsibility of ministries of health. Political leaders and technical authorities in charge of finance, education, environment and social affairs must be an integral part of the solution, just as civil society and the private sector also have a crucial role to play. In this regard, we would like to recognize the representatives of ministries of finance, education and labour who are present at this meeting, along with those of the ministries of health.

Second, this meeting is the result of a genuine multilateral collaborative effort. The Government of Jamaica not only generously accepted to host it, but will also convey the conclusions of the meeting to the 2009 Annual Ministerial Review during the next session of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. The Government of Luxemburg facilitated the participation of several delegations. Moreover, it is a genuine example of inter-agency cooperation between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, PAHO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the Caribbean Community and ECLAC, with support from UNICEF, UNFPA, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Labour Organization, among others.

I wish you all success in this meeting and thank you for your attention.