First Inter-American Conference on Society, Violence, and Health

As a part of the strategy to promote the Regional Plan of Action on Violence and Health, the First Conference on Society, Violence, and Health was held at the headquarters of the Pan American Health Organization in Washington 16-17 November 1994. The objectives of the Conference were to: 1) Draft a declaration calling upon the heads of state of the American States to mobilize resources in order to prevent violence; 2) Create a consensus among the national and international cooperation organizations on methods and procedures to achieve effective support for democratic values and the respect of the human rights in societies living in peaceful coexistence; 3) Promote a regional movement of nongovernmental and other organizations in order to create nonviolent communities; 4) Urge the governments of the Hemisphere to commit themselves individually and through international organizations to allocate financial resources capable of reversing the trend toward violence.

The Conference had five panels: 1) Violence as a Public Health Issue; 2) Towards a Democracy without Violence; 3) The Political Economy of Non-Violence; 4) A Culture of Peace for the XXI Century; and 5) Building Non-Violent Social Relations. Distinguished speakers representing various institutions related to the subject area participated in each. As part of the objectives, the participants approved a Declaration that considered the nature of violence, examined its multiple causes and different expressions, and specified the structures of the most vulnerable social groups. Explicit reference was made to the need for carrying out efforts in order to strengthen democracy, seek healthier forms of life, and strive for a culture of peace and coexistence.

The Declaration urged the cosponsors to request the Summit of the Americas, which will meet in Miami in December this year, to adopt both the Declaration and the Regional Plan of Action on Violence and Health, prepared by the Organization. The full text of the Declaration appears below.

Declaration

The participants, ministers, legislators, Nobel Peace Prize winners, mayors and other officials from the countries of the Americas, and representatives of the scientific, cultural, social, intellectual and artistic communities, assembled at the Interamerican Conference on Society, Violence and Health, convened by the Pan American Health Organization, and co-sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank; the United Nations Development Program; the Organization of American States; the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Nations International Children's Fund; and the United States Agency for International Development.

Considering

That violence
1. constitutes a most serious threat to peace and security and to the consolidation of democracy in the Region of the Americas, since it strains the social fabric and invites the adoption of repressive measures;
2. is widespread and expressed in a multitude of ways at the individual, family, institutional, community, city, national and international levels;
3. negatively affects the quality of life of the peoples of the Americas in that it creates fear, destroys family structure, curtails the autonomy of individuals, restrains freedom of action and discourages interpersonal solidarity;
4. constitutes a growing problem for public health as demonstrated by the alarming increase in the rates of mortality, morbidity, and disability in the Region, as well as in the overwhelming loss of potential years of life and its psychosocial effects on populations;
5. exacts an enormous economic toll on society, generates growing expenditures for health and security and decreases productivity; and
6. directed against women results from a culture of male dominance and expresses itself in alarming proportions in and out of the home.

That its origins
7. include factors such as inequality and social injustice thereby undermining democracy and society's wellbeing, generating frustration, marginalizing populations and perpetuating conflict; and
8. reflects the fragility of the social order, since it includes among its principal victims society's most vulnerable groups whether characterized by age, gender, ethnicity, social and economic conditions or other factors.

That its persistence
9. is fostered by the existence of widespread impunity and patterns of violent social relations, thus perpetuating a culture of violence across generational lines; and
10. is aggravated by the existence of government con-
doned forms of violence, both nationally and internationally.

Taking into account that
11. it is imperative for the State to make every effort to reduce the determinants of violence that diminish the quality of life of its citizens, thus assuring the viability of the rule of law;
12. the prevention and control of violence requires structural reforms to strengthen democracy and social justice as well as to insure the participation of all members of society;
13. it is essential to coordinate activities between states, governments and peoples of the Region as well as at the local level to prevent and control violence, and to promote peaceful coexistence;
14. it is necessary to develop in all countries intersectoral plans and programs for the prevention and control of violence and the promotion of peaceful coexistence in which health-related activities are emphasized;
15. the promotion of non-violent cultures and values requires the active participation of the educational sector and the mass media, both public and private; and
16. in response to the dictates of its Governing Bodies, the Pan American Health Organization has formulated a Regional Plan of Action on Violence and Health, which identifies objectives and proposes strategies for the prevention and control of violence in the Region in coordination with other social sectors, both public and private.

Request
That the Secretariat of the Conference
17. appeals to the Heads of State to redouble their efforts to ensure people’s safety and defend the rule of law;
18. asks Governments and peoples of all countries, especially those most affected by violence, that they make decisive efforts to reduce violence and abolish judicial impunity;
19. calls upon the Governments to honor the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as all other pertinent international agreements, and to provide direct and indirect victims of repression adequate protection and compensation, as well as the necessary means for rehabilitation;
20. asks the Governments of all countries that the reports regularly prepared by public health officials include information and analysis on cases of abuse against women, children and the elderly;
21. calls upon the political, cooperative and financial international and regional organizations to include prevention and control of violence as a primary component of their operations and collaborate jointly and steadfastly to implement the Regional Plan of Action on Violence and Health prepared by the Pan American Health Organization;
22. encourages the mass media, professional, scientific, cultural, artistic, political, and educational associations and religious institutions, as well as community-based groups and other influential members of society, to make every effort to support initiatives aimed at reducing, controlling and preventing violence, and promoting a culture of peace;
23. presents this document at The Summit of the Americas, to be held in Miami in December of 1994; and
24. calls upon the Heads of State of Region to adopt this Declaration and the Regional Plan of Action on Violence and Health and mobilize the necessary resources for its successful implementation.