

## VÍCTOR GIORGI

Director of the  
Inter-American Children's  
Institute



Madam First Lady of the Republic of Colombia, Maria Juliana Sandoval, Ms Juliana Pungillupi, Director General of the ICBF, Mr Francisco Barboza, presidential advisor for human rights and international affairs, Santiago Cardona and Brissa Villa, child and adolescent representatives.

I also wish to greet all of the delegations with us, with 20 States attending today. In a regional context which is problematic, complex, with multiple constraints and causes of concern that involve the authorities for childhood, we think it is a major achievement and a sign of the force of the Inter-American Institute as an instrument, as a meeting venue for the development of consensus to transform the lives of children and adolescents in the region.

I also wish to extend a very special greeting to the children and adolescents who have joined us through the Forum, a venue created three Congresses ago, back in 2009, as a first step on the way to institutionalizing the presence of children in these areas. I should like to reaffirm that so far, the experience has been most positive, has helped us to think, to be self-critical, to perceive the limitations of some of the certainties we handle as adults and technical experts on this topic. So, children and teenagers, thank you very much for being here.

I also want to thank the government of Colombia, through the ICBF, for the efforts they have made to organize this event. All this involved several months' work, with a great deal of discussion, with some difficult moments, as there always are in these cases, which helped to move forward and improve an output that we hope will be very good.

This 22nd Pan American Congress is taking place at a very special time and historical date, the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also at a time when issues in the region that have historically been associated with it, such as violence, poverty, migration, the many expressions of suffering across the continent, have actually become more visible in recent times and have somehow penetrated public opinion, the media and other forums for exchange and debate.

In this coverage, children and adolescents often lack visibility, despite usually being the most affected by such conflicts and situations.

In that sense, in the work of institutions like ours, like the Institute, or specific organizations in each country for childhood matters, such as non-governmental organizations, we certainly have an obligation that goes beyond technical issues and has an ethical character; to actually place children and adolescents first in our concerns and our work, and ensure we can add an increasing number of authorities and political decision makers in all of this work.

The Congress is an event provided for in the statutes of the Inter-American Institute to discuss, share, analyse, and to bring up elements for the development of the action plan that is produced at this stage and covers the following five years. After the Congress, the Directing Council will adopt an action plan for 2019-2023, which will serve as a roadmap to improve and address all of these situations that emerge in various ways and perturb us regarding the rights of childhood and adolescence.

In this respect, we have selected three areas of work: the focal point of violence; protection systems, the consequences of whose fragility and connection difficulties are that efforts achieve few of the expected impacts or results; and the participation focal point, a central theme in this transformation to which we referred. That children and adolescents should no longer be something we talk about and become persons we talk to; become persons we listen to and take into account in our decisions.

The idea is that this Congress should be a space for sharing experiences, which is why it is organized into panels for the presentation of the experiences of States and civil society functioning in coordination, contributing from their different perspectives. At the same time, it should be an area in which to gain experience, engage in analysis, and extract lessons, because although our region has many problems related to children, it also has innumerable experiences gained day by day and providing lessons, which should be taken into account when planning policy and moving forward. Moreover, these experiences are contextualized within the social and cultural reality of America; we often make use of models extrapolated from other realities, which do not work and add to our sense of failure.

Actually, what I wish to suggest is that this is an opportunity for dialogue, listening, and respecting all positions, but that it also an opportunity for learning, and we know that learning can be very labour intensive, and sometimes can also hurt, particularly when the lessons do not match what we expected or wanted. However, I think that it is important for us to achieve an area where we can complement and channel these processes.

Let us hope that the work we engage in at this event is productive for everyone, but primarily for the children and adolescents in our region.