

The Director of PAHO, in conjunction with Prof. Didier Houssin, Director General of Health of France, paid an official visit to the three French departments of the Americas (French Guiana, Martinique, and Guadeloupe) from 8 to 12 May 2006, accompanied by Mr. Georges Vaugier, Ambassador of France to the OAS and PAHO.

In **French Guiana**, the first meeting, at which the Director General of Health of Suriname was present, took place in **Saint Laurent du Maroni**. The French and Surinamese health authorities explored the possibilities of strengthening and improving bilateral cooperation in priority public health programs (malaria) and access to health services (maternity programs, hospitalization), especially in border areas--possibilities that also included the development of the hospitals of Saint Laurent du Maroni (French Guiana) and Albina (Suriname).



In **Apatou**, the delegation had the opportunity to witness first-hand the living and environmental conditions of the population and the major health needs of that community, situated on the banks of the Maroni River.

In **Cayenne**, the Prefect coordinated an interinstitutional meeting to describe and discuss the health situation in the department, the main challenges in the sector, and the progress that had been made.

Two reference institutions were also visited:

- The Pasteur Institute, which gave a presentation on its research and laboratory activities with respect to communicable diseases of interest to the Region (yellow fever, dengue, west Nile fever, etc.).
- The General Hospital of Cayenne, where visits were made to the new emergency services department and offices of the program implemented to fight the dengue epidemic in the department.

In **Martinique**, the Director was present at the establishment of the Regional Public Health Group, an interinstitutional coordinating body created to provide assistance and support for the implementation of the recently adopted Regional Health Public Plan.

The **Fort de France** University Hospital gave a presentation describing its technical expertise and the many resources available for regional cooperation with the Caribbean: emergency services (SAMU), organ transplants, parasitology and virology laboratories, training for health workers, etc.

Meetings were also held with several entities that could potentially contribute to regional cooperation initiatives: the Regional and Departmental Councils, the Interregional Epidemiology Unit (CIRE), the Regional Health Observatory (RHO), the French Development Agency (AFD), and the Center for Vector Control (*Centre de Démoustiquation*). Potential collaboration efforts were explored with these entities in the following areas: shared health services, health insurance development, vector control, basic sanitation and solid waste management, and health situation analysis and monitoring.

The Prefect coordinated an interinstitutional meeting on the preparations that had been made for dealing with the avian influenza threat.

In **Guadeloupe**, the two laboratories of the Pasteur Institute with the potential for regional cooperation were visited: the tuberculosis laboratory and the food and environment (pesticides) laboratory.

Two services at **Pointe à Pitre** University Hospital were visited:

- The specialized sickle cell anemia service, which offers integrated care, including pre- and post-natal diagnosis, counseling for mothers and patients, and the monitoring of chronic patients.
- The kidney transplant service.

In **Basse Terre**, after a joint meeting with members of the Departmental and Regional Councils, the Prefect coordinated an interinstitutional meeting on regional cooperation, with presentations on selected activities in veterinary public health, medicinal plants (TRAMIL database), tuberculosis, sickle cell anemia, HIV/AIDS, and the intraregional cooperation supported by the European Union. Technical cooperation between the countries and networks of the Region was proposed, as was the designation of collaborating centers in support of such cooperation.

Finally, a visit was made to the laboratories of the International Cooperation Research Center for Agrarian Development (CIRAD).

During that visit, the Director of PAHO and France's Director General of Health identified technical assistance needs and areas with major potential for regional cooperation, especially with the Caribbean.