



©Photo by Natsuko Tominega

The opening ceremony of the 3rd GAEL Meeting.

| GAEL MEETING |

The Global Alliance for the Elimination of Leprosy

Third annual meeting, held in Myanmar, reaffirms collaboration among members.

From February 6 to 8, the Third Annual Meeting of the Global Alliance for the Elimination of Leprosy (GAEL) was held in Yangon, Myanmar. The meeting was organized by the World Health Organization, funded by The Nippon Foundation, and hosted by the Ministry of Health of the Government of the Union of Myanmar.

What is GAEL?

GAEL was created in November 1999 by WHO as a way to coordinate leprosy elimination efforts around the world, and thus achieve WHO's goal of eliminating the disease as a public health problem (reducing its incidence to less than one patient per 10,000 people in the population) in every country of the world by the year 2005. While elimination was achieved on a global scale in 2001, several countries remain that have yet to reach that goal. The alliance aims to bring together all of the key players in this fight, and thus comprises a rather lengthy list of very active and influential groups. Included are the governments of endemic countries, WHO, The Nippon Foundation/Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, Novartis/Novartis Foundation for

Sustainable Development, Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), the World Bank, Handicap International, and many national NGOs, such as Pastoral da Crianca and MORHAN, both of Brazil. Additionally, the positions of chair and vice chair rotate annually through the group; this time, the chairmanship was passed from Brazil to Myanmar, while the vice chairmanship went from Nepal to Mozambique. In this way, every country in the group receives a chance to lead and thus is encouraged to take an active role. By coordinating the efforts of all of these groups, WHO is confident that its 2005 goal will be attainable. Indeed, since the formation of the group, the number of endemic countries has fallen dramatically.

The first two meetings of GAEL were held in New Delhi, India and in Brasilia, Brazil. Since its start, the alliance's work and its success have renewed enthusiasm about leprosy elimination among politicians, policy-makers and program managers. Equally important it has stimulated media campaigns in endemic countries, which are helping to overcome the stigma traditionally associated with the disease. To make the efforts of the various groups as efficient as possible, WHO is providing technical and strategic leadership to the elimination