

program, as well as operational guidance. The Nippon Foundation has pledged \$24 million to implement the group's Final Push. Novartis is providing free MDT for all patients (currently valued at \$30 million). DANIDA and the World Bank is supporting leprosy elimination efforts in India. With such strong support, WHO's goal is coming closer and closer to being realized.

The Myanmar Meeting: Overview — Myanmar Achieves Elimination

The Third Annual Meeting began with an inaugural address by His Excellency General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council, Government of the Union of Myanmar. In his speech, he astounded the assembly by announcing that Myanmar had just reached the elimination target in January 2003. Such a proclamation of success reassured the members that their efforts are indeed important and effective. The meeting thus continued in a very upbeat and proactive tone.

H. E. Professor Kyaw Myint, minister of health of



H.E. General Khin Nyunt announces leprosy elimination.

the government of the Union of Myanmar, then offered a warm welcome to the participants. Following this, in the introductory session, statements about the current global leprosy situation were delivered by Dr. Uton Muchtar Rafei, director of WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, Dr. David Heymann, executive director for Communicable Diseases at the WHO and Yohei Sasakawa, president of The Nippon Foundation, who presented his report as a special ambassador.

In the following session, reports were given by WHO regional directors and other representatives from the Regional Offices for Africa, the Americas, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Pacific.

The ministers of health of GAEL member coun-

tries presented reports on the state of affairs in their respective countries, including major challenges and activities that are planned to further progress toward elimination. The countries that made presentations were Angola, Brazil, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal and Niger.

Both since the meeting was held in Myanmar, and due to the recent success of that country, there was a special session held, entitled, "Challenges and Achievements of the Myanmar Leprosy Elimination Programme: Experiences of Health Workers." The session was lead by Dr. Kyaw Nyunt Sein, deputy director, department of health, ministry of health. In this session, it was reaffirmed that the Yangon meeting was historic, due to the fact that the elimination target had been achieved in Myanmar. This achievement was all the more impressive for the fact that it was realized several months ahead of the official deadline.

Working Groups

The plenary sessions were important. However, one of GAEL's strengths is its ability to mobilize and coordinate health workers at various levels. As befits such a group, three working groups were organized that focused on the more concrete aspects of the elimination movement. These groups debated three different topics: Political Support for Integration, Paradoxical Detection Trends and Challenges for Elimination in the Remaining Countries. The lively discussions left participants feeling upbeat and inspired as they headed into the final stages of the fight to eliminate leprosy.

To conclude the meeting and lay the groundwork for future efforts, a document was drawn up, entitled "The Yangon Declaration." This paper set forth the tenets of the Third Meeting, chief among which were:

- an endorsement of the strategic plan, with emphasis on the fact that integration of treatment services and a change in leprosy's negative image are necessary;
- an acknowledgment that only 12 endemic countries remain and that special efforts should be made to help them reach the 2005 deadline;
- thanks to the special ambassador for his work; and
- an acknowledgement that services to women and many underprivileged groups remains insufficient.

A complete copy of this paper can be found at The Nippon Foundation's home page,

www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/eng/ □