

FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY

A MESSAGE FROM THE SPECIAL AMBASSADOR

From Vertical to Horizontal

Myanmar achieved the elimination of leprosy in January 2003. What were the keys to this success? First and foremost was political will: the unshakable leadership required to win the struggle. Another vital key was the integration of the elimination activities into basic health services at an early stage, beginning in the early sixties. An expansion of the scope of elimination work to include not only leprosy specialists but also ordinary health workers, such as midwives and health volunteers, has enabled the participation of a wide range of people in the community.

I am convinced that Myanmar represents an exemplary way of conquering leprosy. The country has gone from solely entrusting things to a vertical structure of professional organizations and specialists, to a horizontal structure that encompasses general health workers, a wide network of NGOs, and media personalities. These groups have helped to promote an awareness among the people that leprosy is curable and no longer a fearful disease. This has in turn enabled effective medical treatment to reach fully into society. This integration has been highly instrumental in Myanmar's success. I believe it is an excellent example for other regions still fighting leprosy.

In my opinion, the shift from vertical to horizontal — a shift from an exclusive approach to a universally integrated approach — is essential. This shift allows a comprehensive network of organizations and individuals to be involved and becomes a significant force when imbued with the goal of not only bringing down the prevalence rate, but also eliminating the stigma associated with the disease. As I see it, the integration of health services and the integration of diverse groups into awareness-building campaigns are vital for successful elimination.



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Leprosy is Curable.

Free Treatment is Available.

Social Discrimination has no Place.

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