

inhabitants, and it has been announced that Myanmar reached their leprosy elimination goal in January 2003 with a prevalence of less than 1 per 10,000 inhabitants. The main challenges for the future are to eliminate leprosy at the remaining divisional and township levels, while simultaneously sustaining community awareness and participation, as well as furthering improvement of the quality of health workers to meet changing situations and needs, including assisting with rehabilitation.

Continuous Improvement

One of the most important lessons that can be learned from Myanmar's campaign has been the way effective action has been built upon the lessons learned from past results. Based on a cycle of plan, action, and analysis, the result is carefully evaluated, shortcomings noted, a new plan drawn up in response to those shortcomings, and then a new cycle of plan, action, and analysis begun. This type of focus on continuous improvement is a universal strategy applicable to a diversity of national settings.

Logistics Backed by Political Will

Presently, the total effect of all programs, combined with the advances in medical technology represented by

MDT and the infrastructure of the entire leprosy elimination effort, have brought the prevalence rate down dramatically. If there is one overall theme running throughout the story of Myanmar's successful campaign against leprosy, it could be said to be *logistics backed by political will*. Naturally, the medical advances leading to MDT were vitally important. However, the current positive outcome could not have been achieved without the coordinated efforts of so many groups and individuals towards a common goal. This is perhaps the most important thing for those of us with major battles ahead to remember — that the focus of our efforts must be the goal, and an ever-present searching vision that looks for the proper logistical methods to achieve that goal.

In Myanmar, having now surpassed the official goal of elimination, it is vital that complacency not set in, as the need for a sustained effort must be maintained to deal with future incidences of the disease. Community awareness regarding the disease, self-diagnosis, and treatment procurement, are all as important as ever, underlining the importance of effective and accurate education at every level of society. □

Based on data obtained from *Progress Towards Leprosy Elimination in Myanmar*, Ministry of Health, Myanmar, January 2003

SPEECH

Achieving Leprosy Elimination

Speech by H. E. General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council, Union of Myanmar at the 3rd Meeting of the Global Alliance for the Elimination of Leprosy (GAEL) Yangon, Myanmar February 6th to 8th, 2003

Leprosy is not only a public health problem; the side effects of the disease result in deformity and disability, and it also carries social stigma and economic costs to the individual and the community. Therefore, the World Health Organization has set a goal of eliminating leprosy in the world by 2005. Moreover, the WHO and its partners launched the Global Alliance for the Elimination of Leprosy in 1999 to give further impetus to the fight against leprosy. At this juncture, allow me to congratulate the Global Alliance for the excellent work implemented since its inception.

The government of Myanmar is fully committed to ensure the highest possible standard of health as one of the fundamental rights of every citizen. In keeping with this political commitment, it has made noteworthy efforts in improving the health of the people (especially

for women and children) and for ensuring equitable access to health care in the rural and border areas. Our National Health Policy is based on the Health for All goals and its prime objective is to strengthen Primary Health Care in our community.

Like other developing nations, Myanmar has to face a number of communicable and non-communicable diseases like tuberculosis, malaria and leprosy. Consequently, Myanmar undertook a number of disease control programmes. Myanmar health workers, with the enthusiastic support of the government and the people, succeeded in controlling many devastating diseases.

I would like to put on record the importance of multi-sectoral development, a mass literacy campaign,



H.E. General Khin Nyunt