

# FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

- Leprosy is curable
- Free treatment is available
- Social discrimination has no place



India's president, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (center) flanked by Chhattisgarh state's chief minister, Dr. Raman Singh (left) and governor, Lt. Gen. K.M. Seth (right) at the opening of the National Conference on Elimination of Leprosy in Raipur.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

## CONTENTS

### The Need to Communicate

As the deadline for elimination approaches, it is apparent that three simple messages have still to reach everyone: leprosy is curable, treatment is free, social discrimination has no place. This knowledge is essential to encourage self-reporting, which has a key role to play in bringing to light new cases as the push for elimination accelerates; it is also vital to breaking down the stigma still associated with the disease, especially in a country such as India.

Why aren't these simple messages better known? We can blame ignorance, prejudice, the presence of the disfigured still among us. We can also, if we choose, blame the media.

I know from personal experience as WHO Ambassador that the media's grasp of leprosy issues is not what those of us working to eliminate the disease would hope. On the other hand, it is a question of priorities. There are many more pressing public health issues in the world today; leprosy is not at the top of the list, even in endemic nations. By extension, it is not at the top of the newsroom agenda, either. After all, leprosy has been around since the dawn of recorded time. It is not a new disease, and "new" is short for "news."

But that is no excuse for ignoring leprosy, or worse, peddling old prejudices or misrepresenting the facts when it is taken up as an issue.

The fact is, there is a story to tell, and a very good story: leprosy elimination is one of the great successes in the health field globally. Some 12.5 million people have been cured, 10 million in India alone. But the other "good" story is that a disease dating back to biblical times has yet to be eliminated, even though a cure exists. Why not?

For this to happen, we need political leaders to maintain their commitment, we need the public to be aware of the symptoms and the cure, we need social awareness that there is nothing to fear from the disease. In short, we need the media.

But rather than expecting the media to be our advocate, we have to make our case to the media. I feel the leprosy community should be doing much more in this respect. If there are times when the media neglects leprosy, or gets the story wrong, we shouldn't blame the media but regard it as our failure and ask what we could be doing better.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

<b>Message</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Report from India</b>	
Raipur delegates urged to seize the moment.	<b>2</b>
<b>Opinion</b>	
Dr. S.D. Gokhale makes the case for advocacy and empowerment.	<b>4</b>
<b>Human Stories</b>	
Birke Nigatu on overcoming leprosy	<b>5</b>
<b>Partners</b>	
LEPRA	<b>5</b>
<b>Ambassador's Journal</b>	
A return visit to India for a key conference on elimination	<b>6</b>
<b>News</b>	
Western Pacific	<b>8</b>
<b>From the Editors</b>	<b>8</b>