

FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



Residents of Khokana settlement near Kathmandu, Nepal

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

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My Resolve to End Discrimination

This spring I had the opportunity to attend the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), where for the first time I addressed members on the stigmatization of people affected by leprosy. From times past, people with the disease, as well as their families, have traditionally been shunned by communities. Even though leprosy is now curable, many people still suffer deep-seated discrimination.

The reason why this has not been taken up as a human rights issue before is because the response to the disease has been primarily a medical one. Furthermore, patients and even those cured of leprosy have been segregated from society and unable to speak out. By bringing this before the UNCHR, I wanted to expose the social discrimination that people affected by leprosy face, and seek a global solution.

Ingrained prejudice and discrimination are not easily eradicated, however. In order for persons affected by leprosy to gain social acceptance, not only must the disease itself be eliminated, but social attitudes must also be changed.

Organizations concerned with human rights must

become involved and create a climate in which the human rights of those affected by leprosy are acknowledged. I am therefore much encouraged by the way that WHO Director-General Dr. Jongwook Lee is speaking out on health and human rights issues.

Eventually, I want to see the U.N. come up with a set of guidelines concerning legislation, education and awareness activities, showing governments and NGOs what they must do to get rid of prejudice and discrimination. First, though, we need the UNCHR to adopt a draft resolution that advocates the human rights of people affected by leprosy. This will serve as the basis to study measures necessary to eliminate discrimination. The support of all countries will be essential, and those that express interest must be fully encouraged.

Much work still needs to be done. But presenting the issue before the UNCHR was an important first step and I am confident of seeing steady progress from now on.

—Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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