

Brazil Launches Elimination Drive

President Lula wants to see leprosy eliminated from the country by the end of 2005.

In the presence of hundreds of people cured of the disease, public officials and volunteers from MORHAN, a reintegration movement for people affected by leprosy, President Lula of Brazil earlier this year launched the National Plan to Eliminate Leprosy from Brazil by 2005.

Brazil is one of the top leprosy-endemic countries in the world, with a reported prevalence rate of more than four per 10,000 population in 2003.

The plan foresees the expansion of free diagnostic and treatment services integrated into the basic health services in 213 cities, access to rehabilitation procedures such as plastic surgery, and restructuring of residential treatment

facilities to provide a more adequate care structure for people with the disease.

Among the country's five regions, the North, Northeast and Southeast contributed to 80 percent of new cases detected in 2003.

Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, secretary of health monitoring at the Ministry of Health, reaffirmed the ministry's goal "to carry out our commitment to eliminate the disease as a public health problem" and said that both the ministry as well as state and municipal departments of health "will spare no efforts to lower the prevalence of Hansen's disease to less than one case for every 10,000 inhabitants by 2005," in line with the WHO target.



WHO's DR. LEE VISITS JAPAN

World Health Organization Director-General Jong-wook Lee met with WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa at The Nippon Foundation in

Tokyo on April 23, 2004. The two reaffirmed their commitment to eliminating leprosy as a public health problem by WHO's target date of 2005. They were joined by Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation chair Kenzo Kiikuni and other foundation executives. ■

FROM THE EDITORS

LEPROSY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

"I can endure losing fingers and toes, hands and feet, but what I cannot tolerate is being cut off from the human race through rejection." These words, quoted by Dr. P.K. Gopal at a panel discussion on leprosy and human rights in Geneva in March, starkly illustrate a side to the disease that modern medicine alone cannot tackle. For while multidrug therapy (MDT) has meant real progress toward the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem, the stigma associated with the disease remains a major cause of suffering.

It was to focus attention on this aspect of leprosy — the discrimination, marginalization and isolation of people affected by the disease — that WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa visited Geneva this spring to address the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (see pages two and three). At the related panel discussion organized by The Nippon Foundation, speakers gave reasons why this issue needs to be tackled urgently, among them that discrimination can

impede medical treatment and deny a normal life to people who have nothing wrong with them. "We should be ashamed," said panelist Anwei Law.

Some of those affected by the disease have banded together to act for themselves. On page seven we profile Zen Ryo Kyo, or the All Japan Hansen's Disease Sanatoria Residents' Association, a remarkable organization formed over 50 years ago by patients to fight for their rights and dignity as human beings.

Ambassador's Journal, meanwhile, takes us from the Mediterranean to the Himalayas. Malta is a country where leprosy has been successfully eradicated; Nepal, by contrast, is high on the list of endemic countries, and must work hard to achieve the elimination target. But Ambassador Sasakawa was impressed on his visit there to learn that leprosy is featured in school textbooks. Educating people about the disease from an early age is the best way to break down discrimination, so this bodes well for the future.

FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY

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