

with other social organizations to pressure the authorities to fulfill their social and public obligations with regard to the treatment and cure of Hansen's disease.

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In 2002, in the run-up to the presidential election, MORHAN started a dialogue with the candidates. Only two — Luis Inacio "Lula" da Silva and Antonio Garotinho — included the elimination as part of their platform. Lula, who is now president, went further and signed a document declaring that if elected he would fight leprosy.

Two years passed, at which point MORHAN publicly aired its dissatisfaction with the government's performance, quoting author Dana Carpender's definition of insanity — "doing the same thing for many years, waiting for different results." The following month, the health ministry announced changes in the way the leprosy elimination program was to be coordinated and the expansion of the national plan to eliminate Hansen's disease.

Soon after, another event with enormous symbolic value occurred: the participation of Cristiano Torres in the Olympic Torch Relay for the 2004 Athens Olympics. Torres, who publicly

declared he once suffered from Hansen's disease, is perhaps the first person in the world affected by the disease to have taken part in the relay.

Through his participation and statements to the media, Torres demonstrated that fighting for a worthwhile life free of prejudice can produce winners.

More recently, WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa visited Brazil. He met with representatives of the health and justice ministries and gave his support to MORHAN's efforts. He urged the authorities to do their best to meet the goal of elimination while reminding them not to overlook the prejudice and stigma people face even after they have been cured of the disease.

Looking ahead, MORHAN will promote the first National Conference of Inhabitants of Old Hospital-Colonies. The purpose is to gather material to include in a report that will serve as a study on what action can be taken at the national level to improve their quality of life. MORHAN is also putting together the first National Exhibition of Cultural Manifestations for the Elimination of Hansen's Disease, which is intended to demonstrate that in order to reduce discrimination, it is necessary to involve all members of society, especially young people.

With the medical progress that has been made, MORHAN believes it is unacceptable to see children affected by Hansen's disease or suffering visible deformity as a result. With the help of our volunteers, we will continue to campaign until we achieve a just society free of Hansen's disease and its accompanying prejudice. ■

ELKE MARAVILHA: ELIMINATION CAMPAIGNER

She's one of the best-known actresses in Brazil through her work in film and television. But there's another side to Elke Maravilha that is less well-known. For the past 15 years, she has been visiting leprosy colonies to spend time with former patients and their families.

Born in the Soviet Union to a Russian father and German mother, Elke went to Brazil right after World War II and struggled for a long time before finally establishing herself as an actress.

Never forgetting the hardships she went through in her own life, Elke now makes time to help leprosy patients, prison inmates and prostitutes, sharing their pain and encouraging them to have hope for the future.

She works closely with MORHAN, a Brazilian NGO fighting leprosy, and is an active participant in campaigns for eliminating the disease and the social stigma attached to it.

"My former husband asked me if I kissed leprosy patients," the actress told WHO

Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa during his recent visit to Brazil. "I said 'Yes' and he started hating me. So I divorced him," she recalls with a laugh. "I'm now happily remarried, and I share my happiness with those who are less fortunate."



Elke offers a message of hope