

‘Our Goal Is Elimination’

Endemic countries give their assessment of the tasks that still remain.

In May, Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa attended the World Health Assembly in Geneva, where he met with health ministers and officials from several leprosy-endemic nations who briefed him on the progress of their elimination strategies. The following is a summary of their remarks.

Dr. Jarbas Barbosa da Silva Jr.,
Vice Minister for Health Surveillance, Brazil



We are working very hard for elimination. Our PR is now 1.7. We are confident that the goal of elimination will be achieved this year. The responses from mayors and governors of endemic cities and states as well as of the media have been good. Hansen’s disease has been seen as a disease of poor people, and thus neglected. But President Lula has visited leprosy hospitals three times, and now there is a lot of interest. I hope you will come to Brazil at the end of this year or the beginning of 2006, when we announce we have achieved elimination.

Lava Kumar Devacota,
Secretary of Health and Population, Nepal



Our PR has fallen to 1.8. Our goal is to achieve elimination. We are making efforts to achieve this in a clear and transparent manner. Since the new government was formed in February, things have gone well. The Maoist rebels do not target health workers or health facilities, and thus do not have much influence on our activities. There are still misconceptions about leprosy, especially in remote areas, and stigma remains an issue, but we are driving home the message that leprosy is curable and treatment is free.

Dr. Sebastiao Sapuilo Veloso,
Minister of Health, Angola



Compared to when you visited two years ago, we are more organized. The people’s satisfaction

level is rising and society is changing. The PR in 2004 was 2.5 and in highly endemic areas, sometimes it is 5 or higher. Access to these areas is a problem. But the area they cover is small and the population density is low. Now, through the national program, we are finally starting to collect data at the municipal level. The PR is coming down, and the gap between the prevalence and detection rates is narrowing. We have a good working relationship with NGOs.

Dr. Emile Bongeli Yeikelo Ya Ato,
Minister of Health, DR Congo



Recently, the situation in the country has settled down, and case detection is picking up. We are working for elimination, focusing on 12 areas of the country. Specifically, we are concentrating on eight projects, and making efforts to detect patients at family and village health clinics. Among new cases, children account for 13%, and Grade II disability is between 11% and 13%.

Fenosoa Ratsimanetrimanana,
Executive Secretary, National Committee on the Fight against AIDS, Madagascar



In 2004, we discovered over 4,000 new cases. Our PR stands at 2.7. In remote areas, the PR is much higher. We are reviewing our strategy to ensure that all health centers are able to offer leprosy services. What we have learnt from the experience of past years is that by making use of existing resources, such as WHO-AFRO, we can do many things. We are strengthening our operation. Our approach is to keep our strategy simple, but think big. For that, we need strong commitment. We plan on working closely with WHO-AFRO. ■