

# FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



Yohei Sasakawa (right) at Kokhana leprosy village, Nepal, in 2004: field visits are an important aspect of the goodwill ambassador's mission.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

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### Beyond 2005

Ever since I was appointed WHO goodwill ambassador for leprosy elimination, I have given this role my highest priority. I do not regard it as an honorary title but one I must earn every day.

For me, the most important part of the job has been going out into the field. This means visiting countries that have yet to achieve elimination; gaining the understanding of political leaders; encouraging health workers, NGOs and others at the front line; and enlisting media support. Above all, it means getting to know persons affected by the disease personally, and helping to rally everyone around our common goal of elimination.

My father was deeply touched by the miserable medical and social predicament of patients and cured persons, and made it his mission to do everything he could to help them. Until his death at the age of 96, he worked tirelessly on their behalf. In fact, from the age of 80 until the end of his life, he made more than 100 trips abroad for this and other purposes.

In the 10 years since his death, much progress has been made. But we are by no

means near the end of the fight, even though we are in the process of passing the elimination milestone, with all but a few countries having already reached the WHO goal.

Given the nature of the disease, the annual number of new cases will continue to top the 100,000-mark for the foreseeable future. Nor must we neglect the needs of those recovered persons who are prone to ulcers and other ailments as a result of nerve damage sustained before they were treated.

Meanwhile, the battle to restore the dignity of leprosy-affected persons and enable them to participate fully in society is really just beginning, after centuries of discrimination and neglect.

As the end of 2005 draws near, I am calmly awaiting the outcome of the elimination strategy and thinking about the next step. Whatever the result, there is plenty still to do. I intend to work for the day when leprosy is no more, and I look forward to your continued support.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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