

FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



ALERT Hospital in Addis Abba, Ethiopia, offers outpatient services, reaction treatment and surgery to patients young and old.

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

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'No Place for Complacency'

In the previous issue, I used this space to congratulate India on eliminating leprosy as a public health problem. I'd like to extend my congratulations to Angola as well and express my sincere gratitude to the people in both countries who made these achievements possible.

In making the announcement, India declared that it would continue to press for elimination at the subnational level. I am deeply appreciative of India's commitment, especially given that several Indian states have populations larger than many of the world's countries.

Its resolve to keep moving forward dispels the misgivings of those who feared that once the WHO goal had been achieved, the government would lose interest. But as I have repeatedly stated, achieving the elimination goal is only a milestone along the path to truly eradicating the disease, and India's commitment reassures me that we are all thinking along the same lines.

"There is no place for complacency at any level" is the clear-cut message coming from the Indian government.

In Myanmar, every February 6 is observed as Leprosy Elimination Day. In times past, Myanmar had a serious leprosy problem. In 1973, its estimated prevalence rate was around 240. Nonetheless, it achieved elimination in 2003.

But as Myanmar's health minister was quick to point out at this year's event, the achievement needs to be sustained. There are still neglected populations to reach, and interest in leprosy control must be maintained even as the disease burden is further reduced.

In Ethiopia, another country that achieved elimination some years back, the disability rate among new cases is extremely troubling, pointing to the need to make adjustments to the leprosy control program. Meanwhile, stigma and discrimination persist.

All this should keep us mindful of the fact that the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem is not the end of our struggle, and that we still have much to do.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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