

FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



Delegates to the second national conference of people affected by leprosy held in New Delhi, India, on October 4, 2006

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR **CONTENTS**

Two Wheels

Ridding the world of leprosy requires that both the medical and social aspects of the disease be addressed. They are two wheels of the same cart. Thanks to the efforts of all concerned on the medical front, the dramatic drop in the number of leprosy cases represents a public health success story. Unfortunately, however, stigma and discrimination remain deep-rooted.

Until recently, no one had aggressively tackled the social aspects of leprosy. For this, I approached what is now the UN Human Rights Council, and later launched a Global Appeal, which 11 world leaders joined me in signing.

In India, I suggested conducting a thorough survey of all the country's leprosy colonies and forming a national network of leprosy-affected persons. I also called for a national conference. The second such conference took place this October in New Delhi. Colony leaders and others made their voices heard as the vice president of India and the chief minister of Delhi listened.

There was one regrettable occurrence. Rooms had been reserved for delegates at a hotel in Delhi,

but the hotel summarily canceled the reservation after learning that its guests would be "Lepers." Needless to say, this event caused great dismay among delegates.

Thanks to the presence of the vice president, the conference was held at Vigyan Bhawan, India's national conference facility. The venue thrilled delegates, who said that "To be part of a meeting there — and one we are leading — is nothing short of a dream."

But this dream is becoming reality. Indians affected by leprosy are getting organized. It is a joy to see them become a body that can put their case to society. They have made many requests to the government, but their basic stance is one of self-help, and I greatly respect them for this.

My goal is to help leprosy-affected people everywhere become more powerfully organized and run their own campaigns. The cooperation of many different organizations will be needed, so I ask for your support.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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