

FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



Meeting a girl affected by leprosy at Gidakom Hospital, Bhutan

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

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Toward Social Integration

Leprosy has two aspects: medical and social. Thanks to multidrug therapy, we are winning the medical battle, but it will take longer to overcome the social stigma. This battle is just as important, for people will not be free of leprosy until they are free of its associated discrimination.

Knowledge of the true nature of the disease needs to reach every corner of society. In this, the role of the media is important. We also need to mobilize the non-leprosy community.

It goes without saying that the best people to talk about leprosy are those who have had the disease. Too often, though, they have lacked a voice. As we approach elimination, it is more important than ever that they make themselves heard, both to encourage others to seek treatment, and to break down barriers to social acceptance.

For this to happen, they will need to feel comfortable talking about their experiences. However, because of the long history of social discrimination, it will not be easy. We have to create an environment in which the leprosy-

affected can speak out, and in which the wider community is receptive to what they have to say. Their message is that leprosy is just another disease, that it is completely curable, and that there is nothing wrong with those who have been cured.

On the medical side, this message is increasingly understood. The general health services no longer treat leprosy as a special sickness. Treatment can be obtained at any health facility. Medical integration is proceeding well.

But to facilitate the social rehabilitation of those affected by leprosy, to help them regain their dignity, we also need social integration. The efforts of governments, corporations, unions, schools and NGOs must be coordinated to ensure that their human rights are respected.

To help in these efforts, we need to empower those cured of the disease, have them speak out and assume positions of responsibility within influential organizations. We must do all we can to create these opportunities.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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