

however, a new strategy is taking shape. Elimination at the national level is targeted for 2005, and at the municipal level for 2010, and there is reason for optimism about the future.

If government efforts in the past may have come up short, the same cannot be said of the NGOs and volunteers that have sought to fill the gap. MORHAN (Reintegration Movement for People Affected by Hansen's Disease), an NGO set up 23 years ago by Francisco Nunes "Bacurau," himself a leprosy-affected person, has been operating a nationwide leprosy helpline called Telehansen. The toll-free service answers 18,000 calls a year. Of these, 47% are from people affected by leprosy and are mainly concerned with questions about how to diagnose leprosy and how to obtain MDT.

While Brazil still faces many difficulties, there are grounds for hope that the situation will start to improve.

In the regions, few of Brazil's health centers have resident doctors, and must rely on routine visits. As a result, there are often no doctors present when people with the disease turn up, which means they can't be examined and treated. This helps to explain why Telehansen receives so many calls on these topics.

MORHAN also wields considerable influence over the government in its capacity as a private pressure group and was very critical of the government's performance in the past. But what was apparent on this visit to Brazil was the good and constructive relationship that now exists between MORHAN and the ministry, working together in a powerful partnership toward a common goal.

There is one more aspect of Brazil's involvement with leprosy that I should like to mention: the work of well-known celebrities, two of whom I met on my visit. Actress Elke Malavilha has been meeting with residents of hospital colonies for the past 15 years (see page 5); Ney Matogrosso, one of Brazil's most popular singers, has been taking part in nationwide leprosy elimination campaigns via TV and other media.

What celebrities such as these, and groups such as MORHAN, are doing is admirable. Together with the forward-looking attitude of President Lula's administration, they left me with the impression that while Brazil still faces many difficulties, there are grounds for hope that the situation will start to improve.

SWITZERLAND

On July 29, I organized a working luncheon in Geneva for the members of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights*. The 56th Session of the Sub-Commission was being held from July 26 to August 13 and the luncheon was designed to put the problem of leprosy and human rights before members and urge the Sub-Commission to take up the issue in its agenda for discussion.

Prior to this, I had met Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Bertrand Ramcharan in July last year. At his suggestion, in August 2003 The Nippon Foundation led the first group of experts including people affected by leprosy to visit the Sub-Commission meeting in Geneva and raise the issue. Then, in March 2004, speaking as an NGO representative, I made the first-ever presentation on leprosy as a human rights problem at the 60th meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).

At the lunch I organized this summer, 22 out of the Sub-Commission's 26 members attended and heard presentations by Dr. Kenzo



Mr. Soli Sorabjee

Kiikuni, Chair, Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, and me on the history and current situation of human rights violations involving leprosy-affected people.

The reaction from those present was quite positive and the chairman of the 56th session,

Mr. Soli Sorabjee, India's representative on the Sub-Commission and his country's attorney general, said on behalf of those attending, "Leprosy is an age-old phenomenon that leads to severe human rights violations. We will be happy to do something to support your movement."

Following this luncheon, the Sub-Commission adopted a unanimous resolution on August 9 to conduct an investigation and produce a working paper on the issue (see page 8 for more details).

I am pleased to note that our efforts are starting to lay the groundwork for an end to human rights violations of those affected by the disease. ■

Reference

* The 26-member Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights is the main subsidiary body of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The 26-member Sub-Commission meets annually in Geneva.