

# FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



Timor-Leste Health Minister Dr. Rui Maria de Araujo presents certificates to recovered persons at Oecusse Enclave in September.

**A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR**

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## Countdown to Elimination

Two months remain until we reach the deadline set by WHO for eliminating leprosy as a public health problem at the national level.

To fulfill my responsibilities as goodwill ambassador, for the last three years I have spent a third of each year traveling to endemic countries and meeting with political leaders, journalists, health ministry officials, field workers, NGO representatives and persons affected by leprosy.

Everywhere I go, I deliver the three messages that leprosy is curable, treatment is free and social discrimination has no place. In some ways, I feel like a politician on the campaign trail.

Come the end of the year, we shall discover what WHO has to report about the success of the elimination strategy. Whatever the final outcome, all countries concerned deserve praise for doing their utmost to achieve elimination, often in the face of great obstacles.

Regarding the use of numerical targets, I am aware of the various criticisms raised. For myself, I believe that setting a target of less than 1 person per 10,000 has been extremely effective in maintaining the motivation of those involved.

For political leaders especially, being able to cite a numerical target has been a very useful way of getting parliamentarians and the media to cooperate.

I have said repeatedly that elimination of leprosy as a public health problem is a milestone along the way to fundamentally eradicating both the disease and the social stigma that for so long has accompanied it.

With that in mind, I intend to become more, not less, active after 2005.

The Nippon Foundation, of which I am chairman, will continue to work through WHO. The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development has indicated that it will be making available free supplies of MDT through 2010. Measures against leprosy will be strengthened through a reinforced partnership between concerned stakeholders.

There are still many people who need our help. With that thought to motivate us, let aim for a world without leprosy.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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