

FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



Yohei Sasakawa (center) with delegates to India's first-ever national conference of persons affected by leprosy held last December in Delhi.

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

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Moving against Discrimination

On January 29, 2006, I was in India to launch a global appeal endorsed by a group of world leaders. The next day, India announced the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem. I was delighted that these two historic events came at the same time, and offer India my warm congratulations on its tremendous achievement.

The global appeal is intended to draw attention to stigma and discrimination against persons affected by leprosy, and generate momentum to resolve this problem once and for all.

Medical people often talk about leprosy as a "neglected (tropical) disease." I find this description inappropriate. To me it sounds disrespectful to all those patients who've suffered from the disease, those who've been cured yet still faced discrimination and those at the front line who have devoted themselves to leprosy work since the days before an effective treatment became available.

That said, it is unfortunately true that when it comes to tackling stigma and discrimination, we all of us have been neglectful. Given how many diseases there are in the world, and despite the

progress made by modern medicine, no other disease has been quite as misunderstood or stigmatized as leprosy. We must not forget the tragic fate of so many throughout its long history.

To truly win the fight against leprosy, we need to move forward simultaneously on both the medical and social fronts, as if they are two sets of wheels on the same car.

It is apparent there will continue to be a fair number of new patients for the time being. These new cases must not be neglected. Important tasks will be to ensure that early detection and prompt treatment occur within the context of an integrated health service environment.

At the same time, we must cure society of the disease of discrimination, and enable leprosy patients, those cured of the disease, and their families to live with dignity.

So let us make this a year when we move forward with increasing momentum in our fight for a world without leprosy.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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