

FOR THE Elimination OF Leprosy

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



Yohei Sasakawa and members of his team meet with a group of people affected by leprosy during a visit to Jakarta in February.

MESSAGE

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Partnering for Progress

Recently I was asked to give the keynote address at a conference in Jakarta on neglected tropical diseases, drawing on my experiences as Goodwill Ambassador for leprosy elimination. Let me summarize my main points.

I think the fight against leprosy should be understood as a fight to ensure that everyone has correct public health information about the disease. I myself spend approximately one-third of each year traveling the world on this mission, lobbying political leaders, visiting health workers at the front line, and seeking media cooperation.

I have been helped in these efforts by the coordinating role played by the WHO in forming an effective partnership among governments of leprosy-endemic countries, ILEP members and other NGOs, donor foundations and the pharmaceutical company, Novartis. It was also extremely important that there was a numerical target and a fixed time frame for achieving leprosy elimination as a public health program. The integration of leprosy services into the general health services at the field level has also been a key element for success.

Unfortunately, however, we have not done enough to tackle stigma and discrimination. Through the launch of two separate global appeals, I am asking government leaders and concerned parties to urge the UN Human Rights Council to formally take up this issue. I am also engaging people affected by leprosy in this effort.

In order to cope effectively with these medical and social challenges, I think it will be important to join forces with other agencies such as UNICEF, the UNDP and the World Bank to form a broad international partnership. I would also suggest sensitizing NGOs dealing with social issues about our work. In addition, let us involve the private sector. I believe many companies would be willing to tackle health and stigma issues as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility.

We need to integrate the talents and capacity of many different bodies. Only then can we be confident that information about health and social issues is reaching people everywhere.

— Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador

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