

‘Good Progress Is Being Made’

Health officials provide updates on road to leprosy elimination and beyond

In May, Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa attended the World Health Assembly in Geneva. While there, he met with several health ministers and officials who briefed him on the progress of leprosy activities in their countries. In addition to these meetings (summarized below), he also met with health ministry officials from Indonesia, Myanmar and Mongolia, as well as with Dr. Luis Gomes Sambo, WHO regional director for Africa, and Dr. Samlee Plianbangchang, WHO regional director for Southeast Asia, and asked for their continued support for leprosy works in the countries and regions concerned.

Dr. José Gomes Temporão
Minister of Health, Brazil



The Brazilian government strongly supports the fight against leprosy. A recent evaluation shows good progress is being made. There is also an important social movement for the defense of patients’ rights with which the government is working closely. *Secretary of Health Surveillance Gerson Oliveira Penna adds:* President Lula initiated a law providing all people affected by leprosy with a pension for life. There is also a presidential order that people affected by leprosy be accepted as part of society.

Prof. David H. Mwakiyusa
Minister of Health and Social Welfare, United Republic of Tanzania



We have detected a large number of patients in border areas between Tanzania and Mozambique, especially since we abolished visas for travel between the two countries. We are now integrating leprosy and TB programs. Personnel are being trained to cover these two diseases. We have closed many leprosariums because we want to remove stigma; those that remain are for people who have nowhere to go. Community-level rehabilitation must be promoted, and we need a good referral system.

Mr. Girirajmani Pokharel
Minister of Health and Population, Nepal

Nepal is in the process of political transition. Health is an important issue. The recent interim constitution states that free access to health services is an indigenous right of the people. We

are committed to achieving the leprosy elimination goal. *Dr. Mahesh Maskey, chairman of the Nepal Health Research Council, adds:* Leprosy is closely associated with poverty. The social stigma attached to the disease is also a big issue. Nepal is economically backward and faces many problems. However, the health indicators are improving, and the commitment of health workers and volunteers is quite high. We are not certain about the current leprosy prevalence rate (PR) but believe it must be improving.



Dr. Anastácio Ruben Sicato
Minister of Health, Republic of Angola



Although leprosy is no longer a critical problem, we are keeping up our leprosy activities and hope leprosy will eventually disappear. The PR now is 0.84. In 2005 it was 0.77 but it went up to 1.21 in 2006 because of active detection. Now it is on the decline again.

Dr. Benoit Kebela Ilunga
Secretary General, Ministry of Public Health, DR Congo



We have achieved elimination in several provinces but we still have a few provinces where PR is high. We have a national strategic plan for elimination and are making our utmost efforts. Country-level PR is 1.55. ■