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EDITORIALS

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Address of the President of the International Leprosy Association, Dr. Jacinto Convit, during the Formal Inaugural Ceremony of the XI International Leprosy Congress, Monday, 13 November 1978*

I have the pleasure of presenting, on behalf of the International Leprosy Association, a most warm greeting of welcome to all of you to the XI International Congress of Leprosy.

For the organization of this Congress, the ILA has had the help of the Government of the Republic of Mexico. The local committee, presided over by Dr. F. Latapí, has had a heavy job in organizing the administrative part of the Congress, and it has fulfilled it very efficiently. The President's Advisory Committee has been in charge of the scientific program, and it has done a magnificent job. We are also deeply indebted to all the private organizations for their important collaboration.

The XI International Congress will undoubtedly surpass all the preceding Congresses since that has been the tendency of

previous Congresses through the introduction into their organization of more novel procedures.

The XI International Leprosy Congress will be a unique opportunity to present all the advances obtained during the previous five years in the fields of scientific research, patient care, training, etc. I will mention briefly the most outstanding aspects.

In scientific research, important advances have been reached in the field of studies related to resistance to infection by *M. leprae*. The studies of cell-mediated immunological phenomena, both in patients and in contacts, have permitted us to determine their relationship with resistance to infection as well as to clarify the mechanisms which produce the disease.

Work related with immunogenetics has had a promising beginning since there are several centers dedicated to medical genetics which have started to be very interested in leprosy and its relationships to genetic aspects, presenting evidence that leprosy might have a genetic basis.

Significant advances have been reached in the field of microbiology, where we have

* Editor's Note: Because of the need to complete preparation of the XI International Congress Supplement of the JOURNAL in order to meet a U.S. Postal Service regulation that the issue be mailed by 30 June 1979, it was impossible to include Dr. Convit's address in the Supplement which appeared with the No. 2 (June 1979) issue of the IJL.

at present practical procedures for identifying *M. leprae*.

Nevertheless, it is in the field of experimental leprosy where the most important advances have been reached and the presence of indigenous leprosy in armadillos has been demonstrated with no room for doubts.

Another interesting model which has been developed in recent years is the model of the nude athymic mouse, with undoubted potentialities.

In the field of research in clinical immunology, there are two aspects which are especially important:

- a) The development of more and more specific antigens from *M. leprae*, which will influence the field of immuno-epidemiology; as well as their use for modern *in vitro* techniques for the study of aspects of cell-mediated immunity and resistance to the disease, as well as in relation to serological techniques, which will have great influence for diagnosis and in epidemiological and control work.
- b) Another of the outstanding contributions refers to the possibility of obtaining a specific vaccine. Most of those who have studied leprosy control measures agree that having a vaccine with a high protective capacity and few side effects would greatly reduce the obstacles which exist at present for the control of the disease.

Thanks to WHO, through its T.D.R. Program, important advances have been reached both in relation to obtaining specific antigens from *M. leprae* and in the development of a specific vaccine against leprosy.

Going on to the field of patient care, the development and application of procedures

for integral rehabilitation have contributed to the prevention of disability due to leprosy as well as to the correction of sequelae through medical and surgical procedures. In this field, as in others, private organizations have had great influence.

The development of new drugs has contributed in an important way to the recuperation of the patient's health as well as to the prevention and solving the problem of resistance of *M. leprae*. This resistance has arisen from monotherapy, and is due, it seems, to the use of low dosages as well as irregular treatment since the controlled use of drugs has been very difficult. In view of this, at present the use of two drugs simultaneously is being counseled.

Finally, the development of personnel training activities, especially of personnel to work in research and field work auxiliaries, is an especially important aspect which is being given new impulse and development.

I would also like to point out that the Congress which is being opened today will give us opportunities for discussing new ideas which will necessarily have great importance for future activities tending to solve problems which still remain open in the various areas.

Before closing, I wish to express once more to the Government and people of this brother country, a pinnacle of democracy and popular achievements, our deep gratitude for all the facilities provided in a really fraternal fashion.

In this beautiful country the persons attending this Congress will be able to appreciate the enormous cultural and artistic development of Mexico.

To ILEP, which coordinates private organizations in numerous activities, our gratitude for their contributions.