

Greetings from China by Prof. Chen Minzhang
Minister of Public Health
People's Republic of China

President Meyers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, please allow me, on behalf of the Ministry of Public Health and the government of the People's Republic of China, to extend my warmest congratulations to the opening of the 14th International Leprosy Congress. I feel very honored to have such an opportunity to be able to attend this Congress, and I would like to show my great appreciation to President Meyers and all the organizers of this event.

Leprosy has long been a threat to health in China. Under the principle of bringing benefit to people, the Chinese government, starting from the economic ruin in 1949, has expended tremendous central and local government financial and material resources to carry out the task of leprosy control. Comprehensive measures are being deployed widely against leprosy, i.e., "to inspect, to collect, to control, to look after, and to research" and, consequently, the registered number of patients suffering from leprosy is decreasing annually. In 1957 during the first China national leprosy conference, the number of registered leprosy patients was 380,000–390,000 compared to 250,000 in 1972, 200,000 in 1981, 100,000 in 1985, 70,000 in 1987, 40,000 in 1989, and 20,000 in 1992. The total number of known leprosy patients is over 480,000, of which nearly 400,000 have been cured.

The effective control of leprosy in China within the last 40 years should be attributed to the following reasons: The first is the continuous growth of the economy in China. Most importantly, personal incomes have increased, the quality of life has improved, and housing standards, hygiene facilities and health care services have improved dramatically. Also, the reform and open-door policies implemented for more than 10 years have increased our concern about health care.

Secondly, there are people specifically in charge of this work in the government departments at different levels. These officials see leprosy elimination as a key to raising

the quality of the nation's health and to building up a modern society.

Thirdly, we have built up a network of professional people responsible for technical control. They exert every effort to advance successfully in technology and scientific research in the struggle against leprosy.

Fourthly, we actively search for people suffering from leprosy in order to provide them with timely treatment and rehabilitation.

Fifthly, we have launched public health education efforts to ease people's fears about leprosy and to create a social environment in which patients may receive treatment.

We have been supported by materials and technologies provided by many countries, international organizations, and individuals. On this occasion, we must recognize Dr. George Hatem Ma Haide, who was a consultant to our Ministry of Public Health. As a vanguard of the new China's medical cause, he unselfishly dedicated his entire life to leprosy control in China as well as in the rest of world, and made outstanding contributions to this end.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the International Leprosy Association, the World Health Organization, the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations and its members Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, Secours aux Lepreux and Cardinal Leger Institute against Leprosy, the Canadian and American Leprosy Missions, the Netherlands Leprosy Relief Association, Amici di Raoul Follereau in Italy, Damien Foundation of Belgium, Leprosy Mission International, German Leprosy Association and other organizations. Also, I take this occasion to extend my respects to all of the friends and experts who have contributed to the control of leprosy in China. We expect continued help and cooperation from international organizations and friends from all walks of life in order to achieve the goal of eliminating leprosy in China.

At this Congress, the ILA will determine the site of the 15th International Leprosy Congress. Dr. George Hatem Ma Haide and I both wrote the president of the ILA in The Hague, The Netherlands, asking that the

15th Congress be held in Beijing. This was and is the common wish of Dr. Ma Haide and the Chinese medical workers. We sincerely hope that this can be accomplished.