

BASIC FEATURES OF THE CONGRESS PROGRAM

As mentioned in previous announcements, this 15th Congress is introducing a radically changed format, hoping to be able to address more adequately the needs we are now facing and those in the future. The four main features of the new format are termed "forward looking," "action oriented," "integrated" and "participant friendly" as described in the following.

Traditional pre-Congress workshops are replaced by a number of half-day workshops in the afternoon during the Congress itself. The state-of-the-art lectures are replaced by a series of "Presentation of Current Issues" in the morning to start off Day 2 to Day 4, followed by "Open Panel Discussions," thus making the whole morning session plenary. Further, Day 5, termed the day of "Synthesis" is also plenary. This is in an attempt to provide each participant with an overall picture of the current and future needs, challenges and possible solutions so, whatever their own specialty, they should be able to make their individual contributions in the future within the total context of the leprosy program and toward the common goal.

This is obviously an experiment, but we believe it is a worthwhile one, and we hope to learn much from this, so that our future Congresses will be even more appropriate and fruitful in support of our future activities, trying to reach "A World Without Leprosy" as speedily as possible.

Forward looking. International Leprosy Congresses in the past, like most similar congresses, were mainly concerned with what had been accomplished up to that point. The oral and poster presentations of accepted papers at this Congress still reflect this aspect as before. However, this Congress, unlike previous ones, is intended primarily to discuss what we should be doing from now on, especially over the next 5 years until we meet again at the next Congress. Therefore, practically all plenary sessions, except on Day 1, and all workshops are designed to discuss future needs and possible answers to those needs; this in spite of the Congress being called "Centennial," commemorating the achievements of the first 100 years of the modern fight

against leprosy since the first International Leprosy Congress in Berlin in 1897. We believe that the fullest appreciation of the past must be shown in our future activities.

Action oriented. Closely allied to the above, this Congress attempts to come up with a series of practical recommendations, or even some action plans at the end of the Congress, after Day 5 of "Synthesis." They will be presented at the start of the Closing Ceremony on Saturday, 12 September, by one of our senior and respected colleagues of the Association as sort of "take home lessons." They are not "official resolutions" of the Congress as such, for which some people expressed a certain uneasiness, but this item is meant to be a useful souvenir of the Congress to all participants, facilitating their future actions toward achieving our common goal which, by now I hope everyone agrees, is to reach "A World Without Leprosy." This goal itself, which is not as precisely sufficient as "eradication," could well be a subject of our discussions as to its definition during this Congress, possibly with a timeframe for achieving it.

Integrated. Traditionally, our Congresses, just like most other "scientific" ones, have been subdivided into many specialized vertical compartments, like chemotherapy, surgery, epidemiology, bacteriology, immunology, etc., the number of which tended to increase recently. In this Congress, all these subjects are grouped into three broad categories only; i.e., "the disease and its control," "social aspects and rehabilitation," and "the causative organism and host responses;" in other words "medical," "social" and "scientific" aspects all under the common overall thesis of "Working Toward A World Without Leprosy." In terms of the individual sessions of Congress programs, there is a considerable degree of mixture or integration so that people normally considered belonging to the "social" group are in workshops with "medical" people, "medical" experts are in the "scientific" group and some basic scientists are in "medical" discussions, etc.

This is based on our firm belief that any future activities in "Working Toward A World Without Leprosy" must be carried

out in close collaboration between these three basic groups as equal partners. By the way, this also reflects our recognition of an increased importance of the "social" aspects, which have been treated almost as an addendum at past Congresses at the tail end of the program. Furthermore, within the "social" group, we are officially welcoming, as regular participants, those "people affected by the disease," i.e., primarily the group of people who used to be called "ex-patients," based on our conviction that they have so much to offer in our future activities and without their active participation a true "World Without Leprosy" is not likely to be achieved.

Participant friendly. Several recent Congresses have indicated that more and more non-ILA members are attending. At both The Hague and Orlando, they outnumbered regular members almost three to one. This clearly indicates that those nonmembers, comprised mostly of field workers (both medical and social in leprosy-endemic countries), are keen to acquire knowledge of recent developments in medical technologies, learn of new concepts and ideas in social aspects. They are glad to be acquainted with newer trends in basic sciences, which are the basis of both medical and social programs concerned with leprosy, and in addition to valuable individual encounters between official sessions.

Thus, there is considerable opportunity for mutual learning processes between the members and nonmembers among the Congress participants, one primarily on what is possible, the other mainly on what is needed, though neither side is far from one role only. To facilitate this aspect of the Congress, there are more opportunities in the program for the audience in the plenary sessions to react to what is being presented. Summaries of the workshops, which are taking place during the Congress sessions proper, will be presented to all the participants, verbally as well as printed reports, again to facilitate some general discussions during the three plenary sessions on Day 5 "Synthesis." These new features, in addition to popular short training courses given in the evenings, introduced at the last Congress in Orlando, are what we term "participant friendly" aspects of the Congress.

Please keep the above four basic features in mind as you go over the daily program and as you actually participate in the various sessions of the Congress during the next 6 days.

Of course, a Congress becomes more "participant friendly" when it can provide what participants need and hope to receive. We would like to hear from as many of you as possible your impressions of this Congress and suggestions for possible improvements or changes in our future Congresses.