

PRESENTATION BY
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ILEP PRESIDENT

It is a real pleasure to address all of you at the beginning of such an important Congress. On behalf of all ILEP Members, I would like to thank the Chinese Organization Committee and the International Leprosy Association for the preparation of such an important and stimulating Congress. The ILEP Federation is proud to co-sponsor this event, which sees the presence of all our Members.

We are all aware of the tremendous achievements in antileprosy activities, which we have experienced since the last international Congress in Orlando (1993). More and more leprosy cases are detected and successfully treated. Prevalence has decreased in many countries. It is thanks to the combined efforts of governments, the WHO, people affected by leprosy and non-governmental organizations (most of whom are members of our Federation) that we can claim some positive results and can subscribe to the theme of this Congress: "Working Toward a World Without Leprosy." This Congress provides us with a platform to celebrate our achievements but, at the same time, to reflect on the new challenges which lie ahead.

In spite of the overall progress toward leprosy eradication, all ILEP Members know that leprosy and its consequences will continue to be with us long after the year 2000. The ILEP brochure, which has been

distributed to all of you, highlights some of the challenges. These include (i) the sustainability of antileprosy activities in the context of radical reforms in the health sector of many countries, (ii) the still unacceptably high number of disabilities, (iii) the need to "open up" the leprosy world so as to benefit from other experiences, and (iv) the potential offered by the participation of people affected by leprosy in the fight against the disease and its consequences.

The medical and scientific aspects of leprosy are very important, but they should not let us forget the social and economic impact of the disease. We are very pleased that this Congress will dedicate a lot of interest to the social aspects of leprosy, including community-based rehabilitation. ILEP Members have, over time, developed a unique expertise in tackling the social and economic impacts of leprosy. Such expertise will continue to be invaluable in the future.

The ILEP Federation believes that the future of antileprosy activities depends on developing new alliances at all levels to help sustain the fight toward leprosy eradication. The future challenges should not be underestimated, especially at this time of celebration of the positive results so far achieved. There is a need to strengthen and develop more effective collaboration mechanisms among our different organizations

and individuals who have an interest in leprosy, starting from those who have been directly affected by the disease.

It is by forging alliances with the major players in health and development worldwide that all of us can ensure that the

achievements of this century continue into the next, and that people affected by leprosy will never again be subjected to the misery, rejection and isolation experienced by so many of them in the past.