

OPENING CEREMONIES

GREETINGS FROM DR. YO YUASA

ILA PRESIDENT

Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is my great privilege and pleasure, representing the Organizer of this XVIth International Leprosy Congress, to welcome all of you. This series of meeting goes back to 1897, when the first Congress was organized in Berlin, more than 100 years ago, when only practical solution proposed was isolation of leprosy patients. We have made great progress since then and now we are talking about elimination or even eradication of leprosy. Please allow me to dwell on that question briefly.

In my personal view, it was our failures and mistakes to deal with the disease, which made leprosy one of the most terrible experience any human can suffer. A great suffering experienced by millions of people up to now over several millennia, and in some cases even now, is not really due to *M. leprae* as such, which in many ways is one of more benign pathogens, but it is entirely due to our reactions toward the disease, more specifically toward the people infected with the disease, which is the cause of the great suffering. Therefore, we must put all blames squarely on ourselves, for all the problems associated with leprosy, hence my insistence that the final goal of our struggle against this disease is not "an eradication of Leprosy" as such, which though commonly accepted one, but in reality neither technically possible at present, nor unlikely to be justifiable ever economically, but instead an "elimination of problems related to leprosy, both medical and social," which in my view is technically feasible and eminently justifiable.

Currently ongoing global effort to "eliminate leprosy as a public health problem" is a right start, but only the first step toward our final goal. In order to reach that goal, much more effort is needed over the next 50 years at least, in my most optimistic forecast. We must improve our case detection and case management to an extent that the majority, say at least 95% of cases, wherever they are, will

be cured without any residual physical damages nor any social and psychological after effects. For them leprosy is only one of many inconveniences they will experience in life, but once it is over, they can forget it completely. For those 5% of cases, hopefully much less, who unfortunately develop some nerve damages and their after effects; physical, psychological and social, we should have ready systems to accept them and care for them, so that they too can maintain a life in a community as normally as possible. Leprosy should not be a cause of making them outcasts, 2nd class citizens, and that is our responsibility.

I am personally convinced that this century, the 21st, which has just began, should be the last century during which our millennia long struggle against leprosy should come to an end, not by eradication of *M. leprae* or Leprosy as such, but by achieving "A WORLD WITHOUT PROBLEMS RELATED TO LEPROSY, MEDICAL AS WELL AS SOCIAL" which I believe is an eminently achievable goal.

May I express my gratitude to the Ministry of Health of Brazil, as well as the State of Bahia and the municipality of Salvador, in honoring their pledge to host this Congress. I also would like to thank for support given to us by our cosponsors, WHO and ILEP.

I trust that this Congress, meticulously prepared by our hard working Brazilian colleagues under capable leadership of Dr. Marcos Virmond will prove to be a right start of the last chapter of our fight against leprosy. So welcome to all the participants, I thank you for your interests and troubles of coming all the way to this beautiful city of Salvador. It is really up to you to make a best use of the opportunity, by actively participating in the various programs which will make this Congress to be a worthwhile one to participate.

So thank you again and my best wishes for your successful and enjoyable stay.

—Dr. Yo Yuasa

*President of the International
Leprosy Association*