

CLOSING REMARKS

Dr. Yo Yuasa
ILA President

My Friends and Colleagues,

We have now come to an end of this XVIth ILC. First of all, I would like to give my thanks to Dr. Marcos Virmond, the Chairperson of the Organizing Committee and its members. They have worked hard indeed, and I hope the fruits of their labor, the program of this congress, proved that their labor was a worthwhile one.

My first experience with this series of congresses was in 1958, when the 7th congress was held in Tokyo. Since then, I have missed only two meetings, the one in Rio de Janeiro and another in Bergen. I have attended 8 congresses altogether over the past 44 years. Unless my memory is failing me, this congress is one of the best in terms of active involvement of the participants. Most of the participants, I believe, had more interesting or attractive presentations in the five days, than they could physically manage to attend. The programmes are sufficiently varied so that most of the participants, whatever their interests or needs, could find something worthwhile to join. Believe me, the organizing committee, and Dr. Marcos in particular, had some difficulties, most of them rather unexpected, that it was only in March, only five months ago that I became fully convinced that this congress would take place as scheduled. So once again my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Marcos and his Brazilian colleagues of the Organizing Committee. I would also like to thank the Ministry of Health of Brazil, as well as the governments of Bahia State and Salvador Municipality for hosting this wonderful congress. My gratitude also goes to the cosponsors of this congress, WHO and ILEP. My most sincere and intimate thanks go to my fellow officers of the last 9 years. Piet, Felton and Bob. Without their constant and strong support, I could not have survived in this taxing position.

Now I am coming to an end of my 14 years of involvement with ILA. I became its member only 1988 when I became the secretary of the association. Four of the people who are responsible for what I am

today were intimately connected with ILA. Dr. Wade, Dr. Ernest Muir, James Ross Inness and Stanley Brown. The reason of my accepting the post of secretary was purely due to my sense of indebtedness to these four illustrious ILA officers, and my desire to repay their kindness by serving ILA. Little did I imagine that I will serve nine more years as its president.

My presidency was not easy, basically because I could not fully identify myself as a proper member of ILA, whatever that means. When I became the president at the end of the XIVth congress in Orland, I said that what I need is not a congratulations but rather a commiseration, because I am accepting the post, not as a recognition or reward for what I have done, but rather a challenge, and extremely difficult challenge, to make ILA a more responsive organization to the changing needs of leprosy in the world. How true was my prediction. Looking back I regret that I have achieved so little, but I beg you to recognize that I have at least tried, though not very successfully. I have been responsible in starting the ILA Forum, ILA History Project, a regional rather than a global leprosy meeting, the Asian Leprosy Congress, and the ILA Technical Forum, each with different degrees of success. Except the first two, my personal contributions were rather limited. Dr. Noordeen and Dr. Walter made the Asian Congress such a success, that there is already a strong demand for the 2nd meeting in Asia, and the ILA Technical Forum was a result of a vision and hard work of Dr. Ji. Perhaps you have noticed that I am pretty good in making other people work hard, including Dr. Marcos and his colleagues for this congress. Perhaps that could be one of the qualifications for the post of presidency.

A writer in the old testaments of the bible wrote "People without vision will perish." Fate of an organization must be the same. ILA must have a vision.

At the Beijing Congress, we have adopted a theme or slogan for the first time in the long history of ILC since 1897. It was "Working toward a world without Leprosy."

For this congress, in its early preparatory days, we have toyed with an idea of finding another theme to fit the congress at the start of the 21st century. But at the end, the organizing committee could not find anything better than what we adopted in Beijing.

So perhaps to achieve "A World without Leprosy" could be the vision of the association as well as leprosy workers worldwide. But that statement could mean several things. Perhaps it is necessary for the association and others involved in leprosy work to come to some consensus. In closing my remarks, perhaps I am permitted to reiterate what I think, which I said at the close of the Beijing congress and at the opening of this congress. For me, what we should be striv-

ing for is not "A world without Leprosy" as such, which could be achieved if we have the adequate medical tools, but "A world without leprosy related problems, both medical and social," because it needs not only new or improved tools, but more significantly it requiring change in our heart, change in our relationship with fellow man, so that whatever the perceived differences in terms of nationality, race, religion, culture or experience with diseases, such as leprosy, we could face and treat our fellow human beings as equals in every possible way. I trust that this congress has made a right start toward that end, which hopefully be reached before the close of this century.

Thank you for your listening.