

Preface

The control of leprosy in the endemic parts of the world is passing through an important phase as a result of the widespread application of multidrug therapy (MDT) as recommended by WHO. At this moment there are many unprecedented changes taking place in many countries in the leprosy situation, most of which are highly favourable. In fact, it appears that developments in disease control are overtaking the accumulation of knowledge of the epidemiology of the disease. While there has been a phenomenal increase in recent years in the basic knowledge of *Mycobacterium leprae* and the host response generated by it, including at molecular and immunological levels, there are as yet no reliable and usable laboratory tools that can be applied on a large scale for the better understanding of the epidemiology of *M. leprae* infection.

The rapidly changing situation in leprosy calls for the development of simple operational and epidemiological methods to assess the current disease situation and to predict future trends. In addition, the development of indicators for evaluating the control of leprosy at different levels, and their application, is essential for monitoring the progress. Thus the application of all existing knowledge on the epidemiology of leprosy to improve disease control is of prime importance, particularly in view of the targeted goal that leprosy should be eliminated as a public health problem by the year 2000, defining elimination as attaining a level of prevalence below 1 case per 10,000.

The International Conference on the Epidemiology of Leprosy in Relation to Control, organized by WHO together with the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation and the Indonesian Government, was held in Jakarta from 17 to 21 June 1991, and was able to address, in depth, several of the issues discussed above and came to useful conclusions and recommendations. The papers contributed by the various scientists were valuable, and will be of considerable interest to leprosy workers. For this reason, it was decided that the Proceedings of the Conference should be published as a special supplement to *Leprosy Review*, and this has been made possible by a generous grant from the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation.

The publication of the Proceedings of the Conference will hopefully generate further interest in studies of the practical problems in leprosy control, with such studies contributing to the overall goal of eliminating leprosy as a public health problem.

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