

ILEP Statement Elimination of Leprosy

Elimination of Leprosy as a Public Health Problem, ILEP

The following statement was made at the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP) Conference held in Hanoi, 4–7 July 1994.

- 1 ILEP brings together 20 non-governmental donor associations which together are the most important source of external funding for anti-leprosy work in endemic countries. Members also offer a considerable fund of expertise.
- 2 The Members of ILEP join with the World Health Organisation (WHO), with governments, and with local partners, in wishing to bring Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT) to people with leprosy as quickly as possible, recognizing that it is the most effective available tool for curing the disease, reducing the pool of transmission, and avoiding the disabilities that result from leprosy.

In 1990 the Members of ILEP adopted the target of MDT for All by the Year 2000. Concerned to bring the best known treatment to *every* individual who needs it; this target is in a sense even more ambitious than achieving a prevalence rate of 1 per 10,000 population.

In projects supported by Members, 64% of all registered patients and 79% of new patients were receiving MDT by the end of 1992. The ILEP Medical Commission is currently consulting projects to identify blocks to 100% coverage.

- 3 ILEP Members consider, however, that it is important to speak in terms of the total number of people affected by leprosy and not only in terms of those requiring chemotherapy.

The current ILEP estimate for the number of people worldwide affected by leprosy is 6.5 million.

Although there may be some overlap, this figure includes around 4 million people with or at risk of deformity as a result of leprosy (ILEP Medical Commission estimate 1992) and around 2.4 million people who are in need of chemotherapy (WHO estimate 1994).

- 4 Achievement of MDT for All (ILEP target) and of Elimination of Leprosy as a Public Health Problem defined as a Prevalence of 1 per 10,000 population (WHO target) will be a historic step in the battle against leprosy.

Members of ILEP believe, however, that it is most important always to keep in mind that achievement of these objectives does not mean the end of leprosy or of work on behalf of all those people who are and will be affected by the disease.

Many heavy tasks will remain beyond the Year 2000:

New cases will continue to appear and a number of fully treated cases will relapse.

Despite the positive experience of some localities that have had effective leprosy control programmes for many years, the number of new cases worldwide has so far shown no sign of decline.

It will be essential to sustain highly effective services under conditions of low endemicity, both for the individuals affected and to avoid resurgence of the disease. This will necessitate maintenance of a cadre of people expert in clinical management of the disease.

Many patients after chemotherapy remain with deformities or at risk of them because of permanent nerve damage and loss of sensation. They have a continuing need of medical services.

The tragedy of leprosy for many of those affected is the social stigma that surrounds it. Patients often have need of social and economic assistance to ensure re-integration into their community and normalization of their lives.

- 5 Great resources are needed to achieve MDT for All, as well as for the other continuing needs.

It would be counter-productive to present the successes achieved with MDT in such a way that those who provide resources—both governments and the hundreds of thousands of individual donors who give to ILEP Members—come to think that the race is over when many laps remain to be run.

- 6 Member-associations of ILEP have for decades been working against leprosy and remain committed to doing so for many years to come.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with governments, with WHO, and with local associations in the best interests of all who are or who will in future be affected by leprosy.

ILEP Member Organizations:

- Aide aux Lépreux Emmaüs-Suisse (ALES)
- ALM International (ALM)
- Association Française Raoul Follereau (FF)
- Associazione Italiana Amici di Raoul Follereau (AIFO)
- British Leprosy Relief Association (LEPRA)
- Comité Exécutif International de l'Ordre de Malte (CIOMAL)
- Damien Foundation Belgium (DFB)
- Deutsches Aussätzigen-Hilfswerk (DAHAW)
- Fondation Luxembourgeoise Raoul Follereau (FL)
- Fondation Père Damien (FO)
- Hartdegen Fund (HF)
- Institut Cardinal Leger Contre la Lèpre (ICLL)
- Le Secours aux Lépreux (SLC)
- Leonard Wood Memorial (LWM)
- Nederlandse Stichting voor Leprabestrijding (NSL)
- Pacific Leprosy Foundation (PLF)
- Red Barnet (RD)
- Sanatorio San Francisco de Borja (SF)
- Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SJ)
- The Leprosy Mission International (TLMI)