

CLOSING REMARKS

Dr. Wayne M. Meyers
Outgoing ILA President

Once again we near the end of another International Leprosy Congress, and the completion of my 5-year term as President of the International Leprosy Association.

Serving with the International Leprosy Association (ILA) has been a great privilege during this era of outstanding advances in the understanding of Hansen's disease and its control. At the onset, I acknowledge, with much appreciation, the contributions that fellow Officers and Councillors of the Association made, especially the following: Secretary Dr. Yuasa, who, even though geographically separated by half a world, maintained frequent contact with me and other officers over many issues; Editor Dr. Hastings, who, with the able help of the Assistant Editor, Mrs. Dee Goodman, maintained the high prestige of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEPROSY; and Treasurer Dr. Ross, who kept the JOURNAL solvent by active fundraising and the judicious management of funds. These Officers often provided valuable counsel on many matters, and I sincerely thank them.

The ILA has continued to enjoy official relationships with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Federation of Antileprosy Associations (ILEP). Without the participation of the WHO and the ILEP agencies, the two primary accomplishments of the ILA during this administration would not have been possible, namely, the support of the publication of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEPROSY and the organization and presentation of this Congress. For this I thank, in particular, Dr. Noordeen, Chief Medical Officer, Leprosy Unit, WHO, and the presidents of ILEP during these five years, Hermann Kober, Jean Loiselle, the late Bill Edgar, and Ken Martin, and their associates.

In the development of this Congress, it has been a pleasure to work with willing and dedicated associates: Dr. Hastings, Secretary for Science; Mr. Frist, Secretary for Administration; and Dr. Ross, Treasurer. These members of the Organizing Committee will

come to the podium to acknowledge the contributions of their equally dedicated and talented staff who often provided the ultimate source of action and, indeed, encouragement in trying times.

We also express profound appreciation for the outstanding and warm collaboration of Mrs. Marcella Pynaert and her staff at the Buena Vista Palace hotel.

The participants made this Congress a memorable learning experience. They came from approximately 100 countries and provided us with valuable new data on the status of the biomedical sciences in leprosy, and of the therapy and care of leprosy patients and former leprosy patients. Many experts shared their views in workshops, state-of-the-art lectures, free papers, short training courses, and teaching exhibits.

We rejoice that multidrug therapy (MDT) now cures large numbers of patients. We cannot forget, however, that the salutary data presented this week on the control of leprosy may represent more than just MDT. Could interactions with other complex factors contribute? For example, changes in socioeconomic conditions and a more than 40-year history of the availability of other efficacious antileprosy therapy. We rejoice, too, that nerve damage and the resultant disabilities and stigma now are receiving more attention.

I applaud all those who persevere in the less dramatic struggle with, for example, the microbiologic secrets of *Mycobacterium leprae*, the search for its precise modes of transmission and possible extrahuman sources, as well as the pathogenesis and early diagnosis of Hansen's disease; and likewise those who tirelessly continue to look for the most effective and more economic therapeutic regimens. In a continually changing scene, some of these efforts may never reach full perfection, but I congratulate those who keep trying.

During this Congress a sometimes subtle, sometimes overt debate surfaced over the meaning of the term "elimination of lep-

rosy." While I delight in the *modus vivendi* that exists as we part, I hope that this controversy will in no way deter all ongoing efforts to conquer this disease to the greatest extent possible, as soon as possible. The very fact that such a discussion is even possible at this Congress is notable, thinking back to the lesser aspirations in this domain of even 5 years ago at the 13th Congress at The Hague.

I want now to take a very brief look at this subject from a personal perspective. Most of you know that no infectious disease has ever been wiped out—eradicated—entirely by chemotherapy. Of course, Hansen's disease must be eliminated as a public health problem before it can be eradicated, so treatment of all patients with active disease must be the first goal, without ever forgetting to provide care for disabled former patients. But let us never neglect the basic research that may provide the knock-out punch for truly eradicating leprosy. The progress in molecular biology and immunology reported at this Congress offers hope for those more effective tools required to answer some of the needs to which I have alluded. Appropriate funding priority for such basic studies must never be minimized. Has it not been basic research that has laid the foundations for the progress we celebrated here this week?

Since the 13th Congress in The Hague in 1988, the world has undergone unimaginable political and socioeconomic change. There is an ever-widening gap between many peoples. Health care delivery systems in some places have seriously deteriorated or even disappeared. Traditional funding sources in some nations now dwindle precariously. Other medical priorities, such as AIDS and resurgent tuberculosis, demand more attention, and none of us knows how this will influence Hansen's disease, directly or indirectly.

And so, we move now into the next administration of the International Leprosy Association. The transfer of leadership comes at a historic moment in the history of the battle against the redoubtable *M. leprae*, and against the miseries it provokes. While there may be shifts in emphases, I know that all Officers, and Councillors, and the membership, share the common goal of the total conquest of Hansen's disease and the disabilities and stigma it afflicts on its victims.

I wish each of you, Dr. Yo Yuasa, Dr. Pieter Feenstra, and all other Officers and Council Members, every success in the future, and pledge my support in whatever measure possible.