

formities. New insights are also opened by a molecular approach to characterizing the interaction between *M. leprae* and the peripheral nerves, which could throw light on a variety of questions, such as why does the bacillus target the nerve and how does it invade the Schwann cell, how often are the nerves infected at the latent stage or do they shelter bacilli responsible for later relapses. Such research could ultimately lead to more effective prevention in the future.

The relationship between the most abstruse pathological phenomenon and the daily life of persons affected by leprosy was well stated by one of the speakers: "If *Mycobacterium leprae* is denied entry to the

nerves, and effective chemotherapy kills the bacteria harbored in other sites, then the stigmatizing deformities associated with nerve damages in leprosy could be eliminated."

That would be elimination at its best.

Facing the new challenges, meeting the needs for change, grasping the opportunities, all require a spirit of partnership. At the Congress, it was referred to as an alliance of all parties concerned.

In this respect, the full participation of persons affected with leprosy at this 15th Congress reflects a major change of perspective as well as a message of encouragement for all of us.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dr. S. K. Noordeen

It is a great pleasure for me to be able to speak at this concluding session and to express my deep appreciation for the successful conclusion of the Congress. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my admiration for the excellent organization of the Congress by our Chinese hosts. In every way this Congress is an important landmark in our fight against leprosy. The theme of the Congress, namely, "Working Toward a World Without Leprosy," itself exemplifies what we are aiming at, and the presentations and discussions at the Congress have been able to give us an insight into the progress we are making toward our goal.

The scientific contributions made at this Congress reflected very well the developments in the various fields of leprosy. The structure of the Congress sessions itself facilitated excellent interaction between participants and opportunities for consensus

building. The participation of scientists, clinicians, field workers and others was very well balanced and so, too, was the participation of people from difficult geographic areas. A particular mention should also be made of the substantial participation of the leprosy-affected persons at this Congress.

In light of the 100-year history of the International Leprosy Congresses, this Congress can easily be identified as one of the best, particularly in relation to highlighting the progress we are making in our fight against leprosy and in addressing the challenges for the future. With regard to the future, what is most important for all of us is to recognize the important opportunity we have to see a world free from leprosy. This calls for further intensified and coordinated efforts by all concerned so that we can reach our goal.