

OPENING CEREMONIES
GREETINGS FROM DR. YO YUASA
ILA PRESIDENT

Dr. Zhang Wen Kang, The Minister
Honorable guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my great privilege and pleasure to welcome all of you to the opening of the XVth International Leprosy Congress. It is termed "Centennial" because the very first international leprosy meeting was held in Berlin in 1897, which was later designated as the first of the series, of which this meeting is the 15th, stretching over a period of 100 years. These meetings have acted as pathfinders, motivators and technical backbones of the modern struggle against leprosy, culminating in the current situation in which leprosy is becoming no longer a serious public health problem in a majority of the countries in the world. We have come a long way since the first meeting in Berlin when the only practical solution they could offer was isolation of patients.

However, all of you are, no doubt, keenly aware that much more could be and should be done for leprosy. Hence, the theme of this Congress "Working Toward a World Without Leprosy."

In order to get closer to what we hope to achieve, this Congress is primarily forward looking, in spite of its "Centennial" designation which could imply backward glancing. Thanks to our German colleagues, an actual centennial celebration took place in Berlin in October 1997 at the same venue. So let us focus our attention on our future tasks at this meeting, hoping we should be able to close the millennia-long history of the human struggle against leprosy before the end of the new century.

Let this Congress be the starting point of the final chapter of that fight, but it depends entirely on how we utilize this opportunity of meetings and discussions among 1000 or more participants from every corner of the world.

Now, I would like to thank the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China for their whole-hearted support, the local organizing committee under Prof. Yin Da Qui for the understanding and full collaboration, and the local secretariat under Dr. Wang Zhou for their hard work. As most of you are aware, we are here in this country thanks to a kind invitation originally extended in The Hague in 1988 by the late Dr. Ma Haide, and repeated by the then Minister of Health, Prof. Chen Min Zhang, in person at the last Congress in Orlando in 1993.

I would also like to pay tribute to our joint sponsors, the World Health Organization and the International Federation of Anti-leprosy Associations. Our collaboration in preparation for this Congress was much closer than ever before, and it is indeed a good omen for our future work since, as you will hear later in today's program, a very close and strong collaboration of these three bodies as equal partners is the key to future success.

Now, a very warm welcome to all the participants, including those people who have had the disease themselves. How all of you, I mean all the participants, utilize the opportunities provided over the next 6 days will make or break this meeting. So, I wish you fruitful meetings, as well as a memorable stay in this great city of Beijing.

Thank you.