From the new ILA President

The 19th Congress of the International Leprosy Association (ILA) ended on September 21 in Beijing, China. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the organising committee which made this congress a real success. The results have been commensurate with the efforts made. I also thank and congratulate Prof. Marcos Virmond, past President of ILA and his team for all the work done, and Prof. Cairns Smith for the scientific organisation of this congress. The success of this 19th ILC is really the result of several years of hard work.

This 19th ILC was an opportunity to discuss the situation of leprosy in the world. The report presented by Professor Cairns Smith is comprehensive and there is no need here to repeat it. I would, however, like to emphasise a few points:

The current situation of leprosy

The current leprosy situation had recently been reported in the WER (2016; 91: 405–420) summarising data received from 136 countries worldwide in 2015. The distribution of newly registered cases (210,758) across WHO regions is as follows: 20,004 new cases (9.5%) from the African Region (AFR); 28,806 new cases (13.6%) from the Americas (AMR); 2,167 new cases (1%) from the Eastern Mediterranean (EMR); 156,118 new cases (74%) from the South-East Asia Region (SEARO); 3,645 new cases (1.7%) from the Western Pacific Regions (WPR); and 18 new cases from the European Region. The proportion of children among new cases globally was 8.9% indicating continued transmission of infection in the communities. Globally, 14,059 new G2D cases were reported.

Confronted with this situation, the 19th ILC provided an opportunity to review several aspects of leprosy control and research. Among the topics presented, I would like to mention two points: the WHO Global Strategy 2016–2020 and the Triple Zero Campaign presented by ILEP.

The Global Leprosy Strategy 2016–2020

The Global Leprosy Strategy (2016–2020) “Accelerating towards a leprosy-free world” was presented at the plenary by Dr Erwin Cooreman, Team Leader of the Global Leprosy Programme (GLP). This strategy is based on the principles of initiating action, ensuring accountability and promoting inclusion. It is built around 3 pillars:

1) Strengthen government ownership, coordination and partnership;
2) Stop leprosy and its complications;
3) Stop discrimination and promote inclusion.
The three key targets are:

(i) Zero G2D among children diagnosed with leprosy;
(ii) Reduction of new leprosy cases with G2D to < 1 case per million population;
(iii) Zero countries with legislation allowing discrimination on the basis of leprosy.

This strategy is a real opportunity. Our main challenges in the coming years will be to implement it successfully. For this purpose, an important element is the commitment of policymakers and governments. This political commitment is essential to ensure a successful implementation of this strategy.

The triple zero campaign

It was pleasing to note that ILEP is working to translate this strategy into concrete actions through its Triple Zero campaign. Presented by Tanya Wood this campaign is articulated around three essential points:

1. Reaching zero transmission through various initiatives such as new research and better diagnostic testing to bring the number of people newly diagnosed with leprosy worldwide down to zero.
2. Achieving zero disabilities in girls and boys by reducing the number who experience preventable disabilities due to leprosy to zero, largely through early detection. Indeed, currently children continue to be diagnosed with visible disabilities and early diagnostic testing and early intervention, along with better data collection, is crucial.
3. Achieving zero discrimination: many countries still have laws that segregate and isolate people affected by leprosy from their communities and even their families. All laws and practices that discriminate against people with leprosy should be abolished in order to bring such discrimination down to zero.

This campaign is undoubtedly an ambitious initiative to work together towards a world without leprosy.

I would like to mention some points presented at the 19th ILC that seem important to me to achieve a world without leprosy, although this list is not exhaustive:

- Post-exposure prophylaxis: undoubtedly this strategy will be of great help in the fight against leprosy, if it proves effective and feasible. We are waiting for the outcome of ongoing studies.
- Cross cutting issues: the collaboration with the NTD network through the implementation of common strategies such as integrated screening for skin diseases, water, sanitation and hygiene etc. . . . is crucial as presented during this 19th ILC.
- Strengthening of the health system and community-based interventions.

We hope that the 20th ILC which will take place in the Philippines will give us the opportunity to measure progress made after this 19th session.

Finally, during the 19th ILC, I had the honour of being elected as President of the ILA. I would like to express my gratitude to all members for choosing me to serve the ILA in this
important position. I would like once again to express my gratitude to Professor Marcos Virmond and all the members of the ILA for this confidence. Together we will work to make this mandate a real success.

I am convinced that together we will unite our efforts to work for the advent of a world without leprosy.

Dr Roch Christian JOHNSON  
President, ILA