Letter to the Editor

Dear colleagues,

The Global Leprosy Programme (GLP) has started to prepare the strategic directions for the global leprosy control activities during the next 5-year period (2011–2015). In order to review the challenges and opportunities, the GLP organised an informal consultation, involving a small group of experts on 17–18 September 2008 at New Delhi, India. The meeting resulted in a number of recommendations on key technical, operational and strategic areas that will need to be re-visited or introduced in developing the ‘Enhanced Strategy for reducing leprosy burden in endemic countries: 2011–2015’. The report of the Consultation, including recommendations is attached for your perusal (see Workshop Report on page 473).

The Enhanced Strategy should be seen as the logical continuation of the previous strategies implemented by WHO, particularly the current one ‘Global Strategy for further reducing the leprosy burden and sustaining leprosy control activities: 2006–2010’ and accompanying ‘Operational Guidelines’. Here, I take the opportunity to put on record my profound appreciation to the members and experts of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP) for their critical support and collaboration in the development and implementation of global strategy in endemic countries.

The Enhanced Strategy will maintain the concepts and guiding principles elaborated in the current strategy and identify critical areas for enhancement during the 2011–2015 period. In this endeavour the GLP is fortunate to have the support of its key partners, particularly the Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation as well as by technical and field experts from around the world who are committed to improve leprosy control activities. The GLP is particularly grateful to Dr S.K. Noordeen, former Head of the WHO Leprosy Programme, for his commitment to assist the GLP in developing the Enhanced Strategy.

There are several reasons for embarking on this task at this point in time. The GLP’s aim is to ensure full involvement and participation of all stake-holders, including National Programme Managers, association of persons affected by leprosy (PALS), experts and members of the ILEP, in every step of the development process and in building consensus along the way as we reach the end of 2010. It also gives the opportunity to devote sufficient time and efforts for advocating the Enhanced Strategy to gain necessary political commitment from the decision makers and professional support from the field workers who will be actually implementing the Enhanced Strategy in endemic countries.

The GLP is currently in the process of setting up a Working Group to prepare the first draft of the proposed ‘Enhanced Strategy for reducing leprosy burden in endemic countries: 2011–2015’. The draft will be circulated widely for comments and suggestions by the end of 2008 or at the latest in January 2009.

A global meeting of selected national programme managers (NPMs) from all WHO Regions, experts and members of ILEP and their Technical Commission and other partners is tentatively scheduled for 13th–15th April 2009, at New Delhi, India. We are optimistic that the global meeting will be co-sponsored by the Nippon Foundation. The main agenda of the global meeting will be to discuss the second draft of the Enhanced Strategy (revised after comments and suggestions received on the first draft), particularly its key components identified for enhancement. The GLP’s expectation is that a final strategy document agreed by all participants will be available at the end of the meeting.
I am writing this to you with the earnest hope to seek your support and guidance in GLP’s endeavour to move a little closer to achieving our common dream of ‘A world without leprosy’.

Yours sincerely

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