

## **Statement of the 5th Regional GLRA- Meeting in Latin America Cuiabá, 21 - 25 June 2004.**

In 1991 WHO formulated the goal of “elimination of leprosy as a public health problem” by the year 2000, defining elimination as a prevalence rate of less than 1 leprosy patient in 10.000 inhabitants. As some countries failed to reach that goal, it was postponed to the year 2005, as an example: Brazil in Latin America.

Elimination is a global goal and a topic of permanent international discussion. This has a direct and significant influence on the work of the participants of this meeting and many of the worries of the Statement of the 1st Regional Meeting in Asunción in 1996 are still valid.

There is no doubt that the WHO resolution has stimulated the interest in some endemic countries, promoting a greater commitment and support. Nevertheless, great worries still exist as to the content and the way how the mentioned goal has been formulated. It is necessary to continue the discussion as to how to avoid possible negative effects the formulation of this goal may have as well as how to keep leprosy on the official agendas.

- Leprosy is a disease, characterized as bringing about disabilities and not only as an infectious illness caused by *M. leprae*. We must not forget the need for permanent care and prevention of the physical and social problems caused by the disease.
- The Incidence is a more adequate indicator, but there is no suitable procedure for its calculation. For that reason we accept the use of the case detection rate; but this rate has not shown a considerable decrease. This has been the case in countries, where, according to the indicator of prevalence, the goal of elimination has already been reached.
- The arbitrary goal of a prevalence of less than 1 leprosy patient in 10.000 inhabitants may be interpreted in a wrong way and lead to the conclusion that with this level of prevalence the illness will disappear by itself.
- Today, however, where most of the countries have reached the goal of elimination on national level, there are still differences between regions and the detection of new cases remains constant or even shows a tendency to increase, making it necessary for the governments to continue with their efforts.
- The elimination of leprosy as public health problem for the population means that the illness does not exist anymore. As consequence, funds by government and non- government organisations are decreasing, resulting in the fact that leprosy is no longer diagnosed by health workers, thus leading to a delay in case detection.
- The reality and experience show that leprosy control programs have to be maintained, even if the goal of elimination of leprosy as a public health problem has been achieved. This is important as many patients still need care after they have been released from treatment because they are suffering from reactions and disabilities.
- We consider the quality and the way of leprosy work for more important for the elimination of leprosy than a simple and arbitrary date can be.