

Remarks

By
Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia

At

Declaration of Yaws Elimination from India

New Delhi, India
19 September 2006

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REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

Excellency, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, Honourable Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; Excellency, Mrs Panabaka Lakshmi, Honourable Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; Dr R.K. Srivastava, Director-General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; Prof. N.K. Ganguly, Director-General, ICMR; Dr Shiv Lal, Dr D .C. Jain; Honourable Guests; Ladies and gentlemen:

It is an honour and privilege to participate in this very important event – the “Declaration of Yaws Elimination from India”. On behalf of WHO, I would like to congratulate the Government of India on this laudable achievement. It is indeed an important milestone in the field of public health in India.

WHO places on record its deep appreciation of the concerted endeavours of the Government to eliminate Yaws from the country. The efforts put in by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as well as the endemic states and districts are particularly praiseworthy. This success is really the outcome of hard work on the part of concerned health staff, and the contribution from other stakeholders.

In this important exercise, the indispensable contributions from the Directorate-General of Health Services and the National Institute of Communicable Diseases must be specially recognized.

It is heartening to learn that India has not reported any new case of Yaws since 2004. This is indeed a remarkable achievement in communicable disease control. This status of zero-disease-incidence has been validated through a suitable process of annual appraisal by competent persons.

I am very delighted to know that India is now aiming at Eradication of Yaws by 2008. Yaws eradication means that, in addition to zero-disease-incidence, there will be no evidence of transmission of the disease agent. This can be determined through sero-survey in the under-five children in the previously endemic areas. Once the eradication goal is achieved, the interventions against this disease can be discontinued. A part of the health resources can be saved for other priority health problems.

I am certain that the achievement of Yaws eradication in India will serve as a model to other endemic countries in the South-East Asia Region. Then, we, the Member States and WHO, can work collaboratively towards a Yaws-free Region. This will, of course, inspire and motivate other endemic countries in the world to take the path shown by India.

In addition to the health impact, this success will contribute significantly to poverty reduction. This is because Yaws is predominantly a disease of extreme poverty, affecting the most marginalized groups, in remote and hard-to-reach areas. I am confident that the success of Yaws elimination and eradication in India will be well documented and the lessons disseminated widely.

The other control programmes, particularly those for neglected diseases, like kala-azar, lymphatic filariasis, and trachoma, can benefit from these lessons.

WHO is indeed very proud of being a partner with the Government of India in this important public health undertaking. I wish to assure all concerned that WHO will spare no efforts in supporting India's progress towards Yaws eradication. We also stand committed to being a close partner in the elimination or eradication of other communicable diseases.

The Fifty-ninth session of WHO's Regional Committee for South-East Asia held last month adopted a resolution calling for intensified efforts of all stakeholders to eliminate or eradicate tropical diseases from the Region. This resolution is another springboard for WHO and its Member States in this Region to further strengthen their collaboration in the fight against these diseases.

Finally, let me gratefully thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to be part of this very important function today. I wish the Government of India all success in their quest to eradicate Yaws from the country by the year 2008.