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TITLE=DEVELOPMENT REPORT – WHO-Leprosy

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This is the VOA Special English Development Report.

The World Health Organization says its ten-year campaign to remove leprosy as a world health problem has been successful. Doctor Gro Harlem Brundtland is head of the Geneva-based W-H-O. She says the number of leprosy cases around the world has been cut by ninety percent during the past ten years. She says efforts continue to completely end the disease.

Leprosy is caused by bacteria spread through liquid from the nose and mouth. The disease mainly affects the skin and nerves. However, if leprosy is not treated leprosy it can cause permanent damage to the skin, nerves, eyes, arms or legs.

In Nineteen-Ninety-Nine, an international campaign began to end leprosy. The World Health Organization, governments of countries most affected by the disease, and several other groups are part of the campaign. This alliance guarantees that all leprosy patients, even if they are poor, have a right to the most modern treatment.

Mizz Brundtland says leprosy has affected humans since the very beginning of recorded history. However, she says it is no longer a disease that requires life-long treatments by medical experts. Instead, patients can take what is called a “multi-drug therapy,” or M-D-T. This modern treatment will cure leprosy in six to twelve months, depending on the form of the disease. The treatment combines several drugs taken daily or once a month.

The W-H-O has given M-D-T to patients free for the last five years. The international drug company Novartis has been manufacturing and providing the treatment without cost. It says it will continue to provide M-D-T until Two-Thousand-Five.

The members of the alliance against leprosy plan to target the countries still threatened by leprosy. Among the estimated six-hundred-thousand victims around the world, the W-H-O believes about seventy percent are in India. The disease also remains a problem in South America, especially in Brazil.

The biggest barriers to completely controlling leprosy may be in Africa. The World Health Organization says this continent is the second most affected area in the world. Yet, the rise of AIDS and other deadly diseases along with armed conflicts and social tension make treating leprosy in Africa difficult.

This VOA Special English Development Report was written by Jill Moss.

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