

## 8th International Symposium on Schistosomiasis Recife (Brazil), 2-5 December, 2001

### Opening Address

For the second time, the city of Recife, located in the Northeast of Brazil – a very rich area in potential and natural beauties, but paradoxally poor because of its social inequalities – scientists came from all over the world to take part on the 8th International Symposium on Schistosomiasis. It is also at this moment, that celebrations which started last year to commemorate 100 years of the Instituto Oswaldo Cruz-Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, and 50 years of its Technical Scientific Unity in Recife, the Aggeu Magalhães Research Center, are officially closed.

This meeting is being held at an extremely difficult moment in mankind's history. Some months ago we left behind, as Prof. Cristovam Buarque said, an insane century, "in which the world, while searching for technical efficiency, killed justice, and by having concentrated itself on science, killed ethics. A century in which man, by using his intelligence, was able to manipulate nature within the limitations of his scientific curiosity, but was not able to use his same intelligence to transform the world into a better and more beautiful one, for the benefit of mankind". The poor countries inherited from the XXth Century the frustrations of their humanitarian dreams, the ones he had wished to incorporate to marginalized population citizenship, for it has been impossible to rescue civil rights and build peace based on justice and solidarity among people.

The progressive breakdown of emergent nations' competitive power, the fruit of an indiscriminate globalization, has been leading to tragic results, in which the poor countries, in order to supply the chronic deficits in their commercial balances and promote their internal development, get into an international debt, which, in turn, has been deepening the ditch of worldly inequality and, therefore, fomenting social crises.

Ideological, religious, political, social and economic contrasts, accumulated throughout centuries, have been feeding, all over the world, the development of terroristic actions, the fruit of fanaticism, hatred and radicalism of disparaging and revolting consciences.

The episodes lived through by American people on that tragic 11 of September 2001, in which thousands of innocent lives were cowardly destroyed, without any doubt they represented, as British Prime Minister Tony Blair asserted, an aggression to civilized world conscience. But, at the same time, what happened there and its present unfolding, represent an uneven reflection on past actions and have been scattering seeds of expectations and hopes as to the need of a new international economic order and the arrival of a new age for all.

It is within this disturbing worldly scenery, with reflections also on Brazil, that the Fundação Oswaldo Cruz promotes, for the eighth time, through the Aggeu Magalhães Research Center, another of its biennial International Seminars on Schistosomiasis, which started in 1987, in order to discuss more recent positions and suggest strategies which lead to the effective control, or to eradication of schistosomiasis, an endemic disease both in Brazil and other regions of the planet, affecting approximately 200 million people.

Although schistosomiasis is a disease in which its biological cycle and epidemiology are known in most endemic areas in the world, and that there is a specific and efficient treatment for it, there are still some aspects that need to be clarified concerning parasite biology, immunopathology, factors which induce the development of serious types of the disease, its relationships to host parasite in undernourished populations, and strategies to control high and low endemic zones, among others.

This Symposium in its context shows a concern which is expressed in the general theme of the event: Is schistosomiasis still a challenge for the XXI Century? Why does a disease of known biological cycle, efficacious therapeutics, easy administration and without serious collateral effects, still affect in Brazil from 8 to 10 million individuals, with 25 to 30 million exposed to risk and death rates of 4,391 patients, only during the period of 1990-1997? And, by the way, these official statistics, according to specialists, probably represent an estimate lower than reality. How to stop progress of urban schistosomiasis, which in the Brazilian Northeast and in other regions of the world represents a permanent threat, even to tracts of public land reserved for tourism, and debilitates the economy of emerging countries? What is the importance of newly discovered medication, in view of the appearance of resistance facing the existing ones? Can it be justified, taking into consideration the present economic picture, the amount of expenditure with researches on anti-schistosomiasis, in terms of cost-benefit?

All these questions require a deeper reflection and this Symposium will surely provide, through debates among specialists, the appearance of new ideas and new solutions.

Nowadays, there is a consensus that "the effective control of schistosomiasis can not be seen outside the social and economic context of affected communities; and it will only be met through social changes which result in the betterment of life conditions of the less favored populations".

Then, what will the role of scientific community be, besides its strictly technical contribution, in the silence of laboratories or by working directly with communities? What are the limitations of our performance, if we really wish a XXI Century free of parasites, as it was proposed in Japan in 1998, by Japanese prime minister R Hashimoto, who

suggested the integration of scientific and financial resources of countries belonging to the Group of the 7 with international organizations, during the opening session of the 9th International Congress on Parasitology?

This 8th Symposium intends to honor some living Brazilian scientists, due to their valuable contributions to the advancement of scientific knowledge in several aspects related to study of schistosomiasis. These are doctors Wladimir Lobato Paraense, Luis Rey, Aluizio Prata, Zilton Andrade, José Rodrigues Coura, Naftale Katz, Frederico Simões Barbosa, Ageu Magalhães Filho and Salomão Kelner.

The trophy which will be given to them symbolizes our admiration, our respect and our recognition of the work developed along their fecund lives.

Among the researchers to be honored there is one who has double citizenship: by birth he is an American, by adoption he is a Brazilian. I am referring to Dr Allen W Cheever, who was chosen because of the importance of his work, by the affection with which he has planted his roots in this country and as a representative of American scientific community present at this session, to whom this Symposium pays honor and shows solidarity for the tragedies which have happened in the United States, since last 11 September.

I can not conclude these words without a very sincere “thank you very much” to this Symposium Steering Committee, for their day-by-day dedication and enthusiasm. For these last two years they have stood by me, sharing tasks and taking over responsibilities. To the Steering Committee must be given credit for any success we may get throughout this 8th Symposium.

Words of gratitude also go to Dr Paulo Machiori Buss, President of the Fundação Oswaldo Cruz and Honor President of this 8th International Symposium on Schistosomiasis, for his support, friendship and readiness to solve multiple inner and external difficulties related to the organization of this event.

Our thankfulness is, of course, extended to our sponsors: OMS/TDR (Special Programme for Tropical Diseases Research and Training, in the person of Dr Carlos M Morel and Fábio Zicker; to the Institute of Pharmaceutical Technology (here represented by director Dr Eloan Pinheiro); to vice-president of Research and Technological Development of Fiocruz (here represented by Dr Euzenir Nunes Sarno); to the National Center of Epidemiology of the National Health Foundation (here represented by its director Dr Jarbas Barbosa); to the Secretariat for Special Policies of the Health Ministry (here represented by Dr Cláudio Duarte); to the Ageu Magalhães Research Center (here represented by its director Alexandre Bezerra de Carvalho); to Cinzel (here represented by Dr Carlos Tavares) and to Paulo Loureiro, Clinical Analyses Laboratory.

Finally, we are also very grateful to our colleagues who are taking part in Conferences, Round Tables and the Committee for the Judgment of Awards “Jose Pellegrino” and “Amaury Coutinho” to be awarded during the Closing Session of this Conclave, and to Pernambuco State University which sponsored these prizes.

To the authorities who are attending this meeting, on behalf of the Steering Committee and on behalf of myself, I thank you for the honor of the presence of each one of you.

Dear colleagues who are participating in this Symposium: you are very welcome to this city of both literary and historical traditions. The people from Recife, are proud of their contribution to the history of Brazil. It is with pleasure that we shall start working together tomorrow morning. All of us will have a good time and are going to take advantage of our sincere fellowship.

We have lost the XXth Century, in the emerging countries, in the struggle against poverty and misery, background of the so-called underdevelopment diseases. There will be no development if man will ever need to be extending his hand in order to ask for food. If he still gets sick and dies because of lack of basic sanitation, and abundance of parasites which bring about verminous diseases and other diseases related to bad environmental conditions.

We shall not lose the XXI Century!

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