

# The Right to Sight

Carl Zeiss is supporting a center for ophthalmology in India.



Poverty leads to blindness, and anyone who is blind stays poor. This is the vicious circle that the inhabitants of developing countries can only escape through external aid. Many people could retain their sight if preventive action were taken in good time beforehand. This costs money and demands commitment. The good message is: the commitment is there, and the money too.



Every day more than 600 patients are treated in the institute.

Both come from the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Association for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) and from companies like Carl Zeiss. Their vision for the next twelve years: preventable blindness is to be overcome by the year 2020, as everyone has a right to sight. One adult goes blind every five seconds, and one child every minute, according to the Christoffel Mission for the Blind in Germany. 80 percent of these people could be spared this fate through prevention and early surgery. The WHO and IAPB therefore created the "Vision 2020 – The Right to Sight" campaign in 1999. The goal: In 2020 no one should go blind for reasons that can be eliminated or prevented. Making sure the vision does not remain a utopia.

**Vitamin A deficiency.** Half of all blind people suffer from cataract and could be cured by surgery. In industrialized countries this procedure has been routine for several years now. In developing countries it only costs about 30 euros, but it is nevertheless unaffordable for many people. Children often lose their sight through infectious diseases such as river blindness or conjunctivitis. They also suffer from cataract, and premature babies frequently display retinal damage similar to that caused by diabetes. The most common cause of blindness in children is a vitamin A deficiency usually attributable to a lack of money, and often also to insufficient knowledge. Children need clean water, better sanitary conditions, a basic supply of medication and vitamin supplements, and health education. In the developing countries there is not only a short-

age of doctors, nurses and eye care professionals, but also inadequate technical and logistic conditions for proper eye care. In Germany, there is one ophthalmologist to every 13,000 people, in Africa one to every million. Therefore, the training of experts is just as important as the setup and expansion of infrastructure.

**The dream of treatment for everyone.** India is one of the countries most afflicted by blindness. As far back as 1987, Gullapalli N. Rao founded the L V Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad, today a center for ophthalmology and medical training. The founder had experienced eye clinics in the USA and was impressed. "It was my dream to offer all Indians this type of treatment right on their doorstep, regardless of their social or economic status." He won the support of movie maker L V Prasad for his idea. Prasad provided premises in Hyderabad and financed the setup of the facility which now bears his name.

**Study and scholarships.** Today, the L V Prasad Eye Institute is one of the most important Vision 2020 institutions. The hospital treats more than 600 patients – also free of charge if they cannot pay – and performs 70 operations every day. The children's ward is the first of its kind in a developing country. At the same time, the institute is a national center for clinical research and is currently working on the world's largest patient study on corneal transplantation. The affiliated L V Prasad ZEISS International Academy for Advanced Ophthalmic Education offers very practical training and a Carl Zeiss scholarship for



Definitely worth seeing in Hyberbad: the Charminar in the Old Town.

the best students. The donation made by the Carl Zeiss Foundation to the institute in 2004 reflects the significance of the work against blindness. The money is being used to train eye surgeons in India.

*Ursula Walther*

## The details

### **Vision 2020**

*In Anglo-Saxon countries normal visual performance is called 20/20 vision. This means: if you can see the same letters and numerals as most test persons at a distance of 20 feet from the test chart, you are said to have normal vision. The 20/20 in the name of the campaign therefore has two meanings. By the year 2020, all people should have normal vision if this can be achieved with medical and social measures.*

### **WHO and IABP**

*The World Health Organization is a United Nations organization. Since its foundation in 1948, it has been committed to healthy living conditions in all countries of the earth. It has a membership of 193 states. Since 1975, the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness has bundled a wide variety of official and unofficial institutions and groups which are dedicated to the fight against blindness.*

*Information at:  
[www.iapb.org](http://www.iapb.org)*