

## **LCIF Congratulates China on Trachoma Progress**

OAK BROOK, Illinois, USA, June 22, 2015 – During the 68<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, the Delegation of the People's Republic of China shared the findings of the trachoma assessment, and concluded that this blinding disease does not represent a public health threat.

“This declaration by the Chinese government is a significant victory for the Chinese people and Lions Clubs International. Trachoma is a disease that flourishes in economically marginalized areas. The announcement is, therefore, a testament to the strides the Chinese government has made to improve the health and welfare of its people. As a Lion, I am proud that we were able to play an important role in helping China to verify this milestone, and I look forward to our supporting the Chinese eye care system in the future,” said Wing-Kun Tam, Past International President and Executive Chairman of SightFirst China Action, Lions Clubs International.

Lions and Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) were instrumental in the key assessment and surveillance activities that helped China eliminate blinding trachoma as a public health threat. When the partnership with the Chinese government started in 2010, estimates suggested that over 350 million people lived in suspected endemic areas.

Trachoma, the leading cause of preventable blindness, is one of the oldest known infectious diseases. Children and women are most susceptible to the disease, which often occurs in clusters, infecting entire families and communities for generations.

China has benefitted from a long period of financial prosperity, societal changes, improvement of living standards, and enhanced access to health services. In order to evaluate if there were still areas of the country where blindness from trachoma might still constitute a risk of public health relevance, LCIF funded a multi-year assessment of the trachoma situation in China as recommended by WHA resolution 51.11. Local ophthalmologists were trained by the World Health Organization (WHO) to implement a field effort to assess areas known or suspected to be at high-risk for having blindness from trachoma. The Lions of Hong Kong/Macau and China helped coordinate the work with the Chinese government and the WHO, supported the field work, and contributed to raising public awareness of the activities being carried out.

LCIF has supported projects that improve the eye care system in China since 1999. As part of its SightFirst China Action program, LCIF has donated over US\$30 million to strengthen the national eye care infrastructure and increase access to vision care, including funding for surgeries, hospitals and training. The assessment on the status of blindness from trachoma as a public health problem in China demonstrated what can be accomplished when governments, volunteers and international organizations cooperate to eliminate preventable causes of blindness.

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### **About Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF)**

Lions Clubs International Foundation is the grant-making body of Lions Clubs International, the world's largest volunteer service club organization. The LCIF SightFirst program, Lions' flagship initiative, builds comprehensive eye care systems to fight the major causes of blindness and care for blind and visually impaired persons. Since 1990, the SightFirst program has helped restore sight to more than 30 million people around the world. Lions have raised more than \$415 million to provide surgeries, to improve of hundreds of eye care facilities and train of thousands of eye care professionals. For more information, visit [www.lcif.org](http://www.lcif.org).

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