

## The Hanoi Declaration

Sir,

Cleft lip and palate is one of the most common congenital anomalies. Cleft lip and palate are seen in approximately 1/500 newborn babies. Based on this prevalence, approximately 14 million people suffer from cleft lip and palate on this planet.<sup>[1]</sup> Despite the fact that cleft lip and palate is one of the most common congenital anomalies, more than 30% of mothers of children with cleft lip and palate consider committing suicide.<sup>[2]</sup>

Currently, children with cleft lip and palate may receive orthodontic treatment such as an artificial palatal plate with a nasal stent during infancy before the surgery for a potentially better outcome. Moreover, surgeries for clefts have improved, and children with clefts get better outcomes from several surgeries and other advanced treatments such as bone grafting. The technique of cleft lip and palate treatment has improved such that appropriate treatment does not leave any functional problem in children with cleft lip and palate. Children with treated cleft lip and palate can now stand as peers beside children without cleft and positively contribute to the development of their country. In spite of this fact, there remains the unspoken problem which threatens developing children with clefts. That is abortion. Fortunately medical treatment keeps on evolving relentlessly, but the progression sometimes can cause unintended consequences. With the progression of diagnostic imaging, mothers get prenatal diagnoses of children with clefts at an early stage of their pregnancy, and, as a result, many unborn children with clefts are killed by abortion. The congenital oral clefts obviously are located in the oral region. From the other point of view, it may be said that mothers do not kill their kindergarten-age children if they sustain an injury of their oral cavity. The reason mothers choose abortion is because their children are still fetuses as well as there is knowledge of proper available treatment. It is well known, the operation for cleft lip and palate takes only a couple of hours. It should be emphasized that the appropriate treatment does not leave any functional problem in children, and children can grow to be a helpful human resource for the country. It is extremely sad but due to the myth that cleft lip and palate is a permanent unavoidable disability, lives of many children with cleft lip and palate are claimed for this reason.

An awareness campaign and formulation of recommendations about this cleft condition are required. We must cease performing abortion for reasons related to the existence of congenital anomalies such as cleft lip and palate, which can be fully rehabilitated by treatment.

We spent 3 years in discussion of this subject and at the International Cleft Lip and Palate Foundation Congress in Hanoi on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2013, "The Hanoi Declaration" was published and distributed. The International cleft lip and palate foundation will also make manuals and DVDs to educate parents of children with clefts and will request ratification and approval of WHO and governments.

It is obvious that there are great challenges in order to save "Fetal lives." With the hope of healthy growth of children with clefts, your approval of the Hanoi declaration helps your friends and families learn about it more. Love for mankind and to act to the best of our ability within the limits of our means are required to save fetus' lives and support mothers.

The first step is your approval of the Hanoi Declaration and to make it widely known by people around you. The Hanoi Declaration requests your understanding and help.

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