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## THE CHALLENGE OF CHAGAS' DISEASE

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The basic scientist living in a developing country should not apologize for being devoted to problems that are considered academic and/or irrelevant for most of the people around him. Basic science is basically important for any country, especially for those that are thriving to get over from underdevelopment. However, when one is studying basic aspects concerning Chagas' disease, he is frequently confronted with some questions: Do you have or should you have some degree of responsibility concerning the fate of millions who are infected with *Trypanosoma cruzi* and dying of Chagas' disease, a perfectly preventable condition? Do we need more scientific knowledge or do we rather need political priorities and determination to successfully fight this condition? Are the scientists who are looking for protective antigens to prepare vaccines with the help of genetic engineering, or trying better diagnostic tools with DNA probes, or investigating membrane receptors in order to find ways of blocking parasite penetration into cells and so on, really diverting attention and money from more effective measures of prophylaxis, such as represented by the use of insecticides or better rural housing?

Some consider such scientist as being alienated. A sarcastic joke says that there are more people living out of Chagas' disease rather than dying of Chagas' disease. It is also symptomatic that PMDB (the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement) has stated that our medical research should cut off from the traditional scientific-technological dependency and be engaged

into resolving our more practical health problems.

Those of us who have been attending this annual meeting at Caxambu know that we take Chagas'disease primarily as a stimulus and as a model in order to develop our basic biological research. This latter is of an extraordinary importance for the future of the country and of course we are not to be blamed for the lack of proper outlook and understanding from some of our critics.

However, being basical researchers on the problems of Chagas'disease in a country of the third world we cannot afford to be alienated from the general problems posed by this condition. We ought to know how to ask the proper questions and we should not merely try to imitate or to compete with what is currently being done in the laboratories of rich countries. We should not look for highly sophisticate technology as a finality in itself. We should be abreast of the world litterature on Chagas'disease, and should attempt to utilize the appropriate technology, the most advanced possible, but at the same time we should keep a just perspective, and be creative and meaningful in our research. This is the great challenge presented to us nowadays in the field of basic research on Chagas'disease.