

the occasion aroused.

Commented Anjan Dey, who overcame leprosy to qualify as a physiotherapist at the hospital near Pune where he once swept floors as a patient, such an event would have been “unthinkable” just a few years ago. “I am really happy to note that for the first time hundreds of people affected by leprosy have come to the national capital, are staying in good hotels, organizing their own conference and interacting in the best tradition of a national meet,” he said.

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During an “empowerment session,” delegates highlighted their concerns and hopes, and urged that the momentum begun by the conference not be allowed to taper off.

“The gains of this historic conference should not be lost after the program is over,” said delegate M. Gurappa from Haryana, adding that there should be a national body, headquartered in Delhi, where persons affected by leprosy could come together and “present a united face in front of the government, business and other sections of society.”

Echoing his comment, Bhimarao Madhale from Maharashtra said, “A very important thing for us is to be united, because without unity we cannot achieve anything substantial, in spite of the good wishes of many others.”

From West Bengal, Swapan Kumar Bannerjee called for “a strong democratic movement among cured people to create their leadership and make society at large take cognizance of our rightful needs.”

During the day, the newly-created National Forum for the Empowerment of People Affected by Leprosy met to discuss its future agenda. The 17-member forum, including 9 persons affected by leprosy, agreed to complete an ongoing survey of the nation’s self-settled colonies and draw up a list of their needs.

A key document to emerge from the conference was the Delhi Declaration of Dignity (see below), listing 14 recommendations to promote quality of life, freedom from degrading treatment and each individual’s most basic human rights.

It is now up to those who took part to build on the foundations the conference created, but what it already achieved was summed up by an elderly woman from Haryana, who said, “I did not get the bag and shawl that were given to all delegates as I was late arriving, but what I got today was something I never got in the last 30 years since I had leprosy: respect and dignity.” ■

Disabilities Act.

7. Every effort should be made to encourage support and inclusion of the person affected by leprosy within their family.
8. Individuals affected by leprosy and organizations representing these individuals should be supported in efforts to develop productive networks that will ensure that the voice of the persons affected by leprosy continues to be heard.
9. Every effort should be made to ensure that children of persons affected by leprosy receive equal opportunities for education and employment.
10. A national effort should be made to ensure that all types of media, including newspapers, films and television, portray individuals affected by leprosy with dignity.

The media should be encouraged to become part of the effort to eliminate the stigma by promoting modern, current information about the disease and those affected by it.

11. Proper housing and care should be given to elderly persons affected by leprosy. A reasonable amount not less than Rs. 500/- as pension should be given to the leprosy-disabled persons.
12. Networks to ensure the prevention and treatment of disabilities should be strengthened, especially among hospitals and private health centers.
13. Sustained training programs for government medical staff should be implemented to ensure the ongoing, comprehensive treatment of persons affected by leprosy.
14. Persons affected by leprosy should be afforded their rightful place in the

history of leprosy worldwide. Persons affected by leprosy pledge their support to governments and NGOs to eradicate leprosy from the country and to improve the quality of the lives of the persons affected by leprosy.

In conclusion, we strongly affirm that the final victory in the fight against leprosy should only be declared when there are no more persons to be cured, no more disabilities to treat, no more discrimination and human rights violations to overcome, and when persons once affected by the disease can lead normal, integrated and empowered lives with the same opportunities, rights and duties as their fellow citizens.

Persons affected by leprosy