

# Journeys to India and Ethiopia

Visits to Delhi and Kolkata launch a Global Appeal; travels to Addis Ababa and Shashamane gauge progress in the fight against the disease

## INDIA (JANUARY 28-FEBRUARY 3)



Launching the Global Appeal on World Leprosy Day

On January 29 I was in Delhi to launch the Global Appeal to Eliminate Stigma and Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy (full text on page 3).

Nearly a dozen world leaders and Nobel Laureates had joined me in putting their names to the appeal, which is designed to draw the world's attention to the ongoing problems faced by those affected by the disease.

Among the dignitaries in attendance was the former chief justice of India's Supreme Court, Y.V. Chandrachud, who was one of several distinguished speakers at a symposium on "Law and Leprosy" later in the day.

I also used the occasion to announce that I was establishing a new fund to help empower persons affected by leprosy in India and increase their chances of social and economic integration.

The fund has three goals: to provide persons affected by leprosy with vocational training and job opportunities; to establish micro-credit schemes; and to provide educational opportunities for children living in colonies, using education to break the cycle of stigma and poverty.

On January 30, I moved to Kolkata to announce the Global Appeal to media representatives in West Bengal. Among those joining me on the platform was the state minister for law and justice, who said that there are a number of laws that could help the leprosy-affected but which are not working properly because there is no social awareness of the issues they address. "The law is a cart," he said, "and awareness is the horse. The cart

cannot move without the horse."

The state of Jharkhand, which has a prevalence rate of 1.4, was the last stop on my journey. In the capital, Ranchi, I participated in a media workshop and a state/district level consultation. I also traveled to Jamshedpur, the home of Tata Steel, India's largest private-sector steel company, to attend a human rights seminar and visit a couple of colonies. One of these is supported by Bharat Sevashram Sangha, a Hindu charitable organization that has worked tirelessly to promote leprosy elimination in India. I saw new houses being built and the site was being attractively landscaped.

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On my travels I was accompanied by persons affected by leprosy from Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines. I want to thank them for speaking at the different venues we visited together and for sharing their insights. As Adi Yosep of Indonesia reminded us in Kolkata, we must listen and learn from persons affected by leprosy, respect their voices and not make assumptions on their behalf.



Oli Parwati (far right), a leprosy-affected person from Nepal, chats with residents of a colony during a visit to Jamshedpur, Jharkhand State, in January.