

# Global Appeal Launched

World leaders endorse call for end to stigma against persons affected by leprosy.

A Global Appeal to End Stigma and Discrimination against People Affected by Leprosy was announced in New Delhi, India, on January 29, 2006.

The appeal calls on the UN Commission on Human Rights to take up the issue of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy as an item on its agenda, and requests that it issue principles and guidelines for governments to follow.

It also calls on people all over the world to change their perception of leprosy and help foster an environment in which people with leprosy, those who once had the disease and their families can lead normal lives free from stigma and discrimination.

An initiative of The Nippon Foundation Chairman Yohei Sasakawa, who also serves as WHO Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of

Leprosy, the Global Appeal has been signed by a dozen current or former world leaders and luminaries, including former President of the United States Jimmy Carter, The Dalai Lama and former President of Costa Rica Oscar Arias.

The appeal was launched at a ceremony attended by former Chief Justice of India Y.V. Chandrachud and other dignitaries, and in the afternoon was followed by a two-part seminar on "Law, Human Rights and Leprosy."



India was chosen as the venue as it has the most number of leprosy cases of any country in the world. January 29, 2006, was World Leprosy Day, which falls on the last Sunday in January.

For more information and to see the full text of the appeal, visit <http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp> ■

## Leprosy FACT

● India announced on January 30, 2006, that it has achieved the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem.

## FROM THE EDITORS

### HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Few who were there will forget the sense of history being made when the first national conference of persons affected by leprosy was held last December in New Delhi, India. Titled an "integration and empowerment" conference, it more than lived up to its name. Delegates from all over India — many representing leprosy colonies — came together in a collective show of solidarity, determined to work together to remove the stigma associated with leprosy. For many, traveling to the capital, checking into their hotels and registering for the conference was part of the empowering experience.

The aspirations of these conference delegates were summed up in the 14-point Delhi Declaration (see pages 2-3), a blueprint for action that calls for everything from the repeal of discriminatory laws to the dignified portrayal of persons affected by leprosy in the media.

Some six weeks later, another document was issued — the Global Appeal. As reported on this page, it calls on the UN Commission on Human Rights to take up the issue of stigma and discrimination against people affected by leprosy and has been endorsed by an influential list of world leaders and Nobel laureates.

The fact that in quick succession two initiatives have been launched that put human rights at the top of the agenda should not obscure the fact that the medical side of the disease still requires vigilance.

For years to come, new cases of leprosy will continue to be diagnosed, and the needs of these patients must be addressed. The new WHO strategy focuses on further reducing the leprosy burden and sustaining leprosy control activities as the way forward in 2006 and beyond.

Plus, there is some "unfinished business" left over from last year. A handful of countries have yet to eliminate leprosy as a public health problem. They should be given encouragement to complete the task they have been working toward these past few years, so that they can join other countries in the post-elimination phase.

Some countries, such as Bangladesh (see page 4), which achieved elimination several years ago, have made elimination at the sub-national level next goal as a means to further reduce their leprosy burden.

While this will not be the appropriate strategy in every case, countries need leeway to choose what works best for them.

## FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY

### Publisher

Yohei Sasakawa

### Executive Editor

Tatsuya Tanami

### Editor

Jonathan Lloyd-Owen

### Associate Editors

Akiko Nozawa,

James Huffman

### Layout

Eiko Nishida

### Photographer

Natsuko Tominaga

### Editorial Office

5th Floor, Nippon

Foundation Building,

1-2-2 Akasaka, Minato-ku,

Tokyo 107-8404

Tel: +81-3-6229-5601

Fax: +81-3-6229-5602

[smhf\\_an@tnfb.jp](mailto:smhf_an@tnfb.jp)

With support from:

Sasakawa Memorial

Health Foundation,

The Nippon Foundation

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