

Activists Meet with India's NHRC

Participants air concerns of people affected by leprosy

The acting head of India's National Human Rights Commission told a meeting of leprosy activists in New Delhi on March 5 that the NHRC would take up with the government the matter of laws which violate the human rights of people affected by leprosy.

Justice Dr. Shivraj Patil said that the human rights of life, liberty, equality and dignity have been enshrined in India's constitution, and that no one can deny or violate them.

Organized by the International Leprosy Union (ILU), the meeting at the NHRC was arranged to enable members of the commission to hear directly from people affected by leprosy and their supporters. Among the requests participants put to the NHRC were for help in ensuring that the basic human rights of the leprosy-affected are respected, support in getting the Law Commission to review discriminatory laws, and efforts to ensure that the legal system is free from discrimination.

One of those taking part, Kamalesh Divyadarshi, pointed out that although leprosy is today a curable disease, there is still mention of it being "incurable" in the law, and he suggested that elected members and representatives should be educated about the disease.

Justice Patil requested that the ILU present a

proposal for a workshop on human rights and leprosy to create awareness about the disease, and the ILU is now following this up.

NATIONAL FORUM WORKSHOP

A capacity-building workshop for state leaders of people affected by leprosy in India was held in Chennai in March. Organized jointly by the National Forum of leprosy-affected persons and IDEA India, the meeting brought together leaders from 10 states in the south, east and west of the country.

The workshop focused on networking, organizing and capacity building so as to enable people affected by leprosy to become agents of change in improving their lives. Some 40 people participated, most of them residents of colonies.

DAY OF DIGNITY AND RESPECT

HANDA Rehabilitation and Welfare Association marked the 9th International Day of Dignity and Respect on March 11 with commemorative events in Guandong, Guangxi and Yunnan provinces of China. The day, which promotes dignity and respect for people affected by leprosy, included performances, tea parties, and visits to leprosy villages, and was well covered in local media. ■

FROM THE EDITORS

PRESERVING HISTORY

A new national leprosy museum opens this month in Japan. As Osamu Sagawa explains on page 4, an important purpose of the museum is to ensure that leprosy, and the many lessons to be drawn from Japan's experience leprosy, are not forgotten.

As such, the museum acts as a monument to all those people whose lives were turned upside down by leprosy and by the legislation adopted to deal with it. It also serves a warning to present and future generations about the need to respect human rights and treat one's fellow human beings with justice and compassion.

Above all, it asks us to ask questions, and consider what is done in the name of society, since for all too long society was content to ignore the basic rights of the people it placed behind sanatorium walls. Don't just look and listen, the museum urges, but stop and think, and ask

yourself 'why?'

As a new museum opens, an old institution is on the verge of closure. The situation involving the Losheng Sanatorium in Taipei (see From the Editors #23) has entered a new phase, with the forcible eviction of the remnants of its elderly population now set for later this month.

Their impending removal has attracted increasingly high-profile demonstrations, but these may have come to late to save the hospital from being leveled and the land used for the construction of part of a mass transit system. Advocates, who would like to see the leprosarium preserved as a historic site, are angered at the disruption to lives of its residents.

The themes of dislocation and upheaval, and the violation of human rights, are dealt with at the Japan's museum, but they are also being played out right now in Taiwan.

FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY

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