



59th World Leprosy Day 29th January 2012

Message from René Stäheli, President of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations

On the occasion of the 59th World Leprosy Day, I am writing to you on behalf of the Members of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP). I would like to extend greetings to all those affected by leprosy and our thanks to all those individuals, organisations and governments actively working together for a world without leprosy.

Over the last 45 years, ILEP Members have helped cure many millions of people affected by leprosy and continue to support vital leprosy work in 72 countries. In addition to the treatment provided, ILEP Members have also helped to prevent further disability, reduce stigma and discrimination, and restore dignity to those affected.

WHO's *Enhanced Global Strategy for Further Reducing the Disease Burden due to Leprosy 2011-2015* lays an increasing emphasis on **equity, social justice and human rights** for those affected. This Global Strategy has been endorsed by National Leprosy Programme Managers from around the world as well as members of the WHO Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for Leprosy, by Novartis, and by experts from both international non-governmental organisations, and organisations of people affected by leprosy. It has been given added support through two important developments during 2011. The first was the publication of the WHO *Guidelines for Strengthening the Participation of Persons Affected by Leprosy in Leprosy Services* (<http://www.ilep.org.uk/library-resources/who-publications/>) and the publication of four *ILEP Guidelines to Reduce Stigma* (<http://www.ilep.org.uk/library-resources/infolep-information-services/subjectguides/leprosy-related-stigma/>).

It is vital that in 2012 the global rhetoric on human rights in leprosy be now translated into practice and action. ILEP Members and their partners can play a key role in enabling persons affected by leprosy to ensure their rights are upheld. Individual ILEP Members together with their partners and people affected themselves are already making headway in working for the repeal of existing discriminatory legislation in many countries and take every opportunity to raise awareness in the media and society in general that there is no place for discrimination and stigma. ILEP has welcomed the recent news from Bangladesh that they have finally repealed their out-of-date and discriminatory laws relating to persons affected by leprosy. ILEP Members are working and advocating for similar progress to be made in other countries where discriminatory legislation remains an obstacle to the achievement of people's rights.

ILEP remains convinced of the need to continue working tirelessly together with all its partners to ensure effective leprosy activities are sustained wherever they are needed. This will require the continued integration of leprosy control activities and provision of training for health workers and others. And, given the well documented links between poverty, exclusion and leprosy, ILEP support will continue to be channelled into preventing disability, promoting community-based rehabilitation and inclusive, rights-based development in a spirit of partnership with leprosy affected persons.

Article 25 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

And so, on the occasion of World Leprosy Day, we renew our commitment to ensuring that all persons affected by leprosy have access to the necessary treatment, rehabilitation and care, without prejudice and stigma, in a world where all human beings have the right to live their lives with dignity. "A World without Leprosy" remains the vision of all partners.



René Stäheli
ILEP President