



Fédération Internationale des Associations contre la Lèpre
International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations

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**Statement from the General Secretary of ILEP
on the Occasion
of the
International Day of Disabled Persons,
3rd December 2007**

The theme for this year's International Day of Disabled Persons is "Decent work for persons with disabilities." In nearly every society, persons with disabilities are deprived of adequate employment opportunities. The denial of opportunities and negative attitudes are the main reasons why persons with disabilities are disproportionately absent from the workforce. This is certainly the case for many thousands of people affected by leprosy. Even those without physical disabilities may be excluded from the labour market due to discrimination and stigma.

The recently adopted UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises, in Article 27, the rights of persons with disabilities to work and employment on an equal basis with others. It stresses the rights of persons with disabilities to earn a living from freely chosen work, and to work in an environment that is both accessible and accepting. As of 29th November the Convention has been ratified by seven countries and signed by 118. Twenty ratifications are needed for the Convention to enter into force.

ILEP Members, in their efforts to support the rights of those affected by leprosy, include in their programmes, supported employment, social enterprises, co-operatives, promotion of entrepreneurship, self-employment and viable micro and small business schemes. This International Day is an invaluable opportunity that should be seized by governments, NGOs, employers and persons with disabilities to discuss and formulate ways that allow persons with disabilities, including those affected by leprosy, to participate fully in the labour market.

Mr Douglas Soutar
General Secretary of ILEP