



55th World Leprosy Day

27th January 2008

Message from Mr Rigo Peeters,
President of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations

Today, on the occasion of the 55th World Leprosy Day, I am writing to you on behalf of the 14 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 40 years, ILEP Members have helped cure many millions of people affected by leprosy and continue to support vital leprosy work in 82 countries. In addition to the treatment provided, ILEP Members have also helped to prevent disability, reduce stigma and discrimination, and restore dignity to those affected.

A significant development in the continuing fight against leprosy in 2007, has been the collaboration and sharing of expertise between the World Health Organization, ILEP and other leading authorities, on the promotion of *Operational Guidelines* to implement the *WHO Global Strategy for Further reducing the Leprosy Burden and Sustaining Leprosy Control Activities:2006 -2010*. Training has begun for Managers of national health services on how they can use these Guidelines to develop policies applicable to their countries. These Guidelines represent an important tool with which to continue the integration of sustainable leprosy activities with other health services.

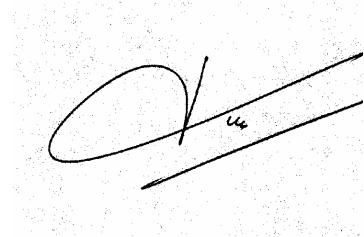
Leprosy, and the attitudes of society towards those affected, can be disabling and one of the important elements of the Global Strategy and its Guidelines is an increased focus on prevention of disability and promotion of rehabilitation. The documents also give important emphasis to the principles of equity and social justice. ILEP supports these developments and January 2008 sees the publication of an important new joint WHO/ILEP publication - a *Technical Guide on Community-Based Rehabilitation and*

Leprosy. Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) is recognized as a key strategy for social inclusion, aimed at overcoming stigma, activity limitations and participation restrictions and improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. As such, it is an approach which is highly relevant to the rehabilitation of people affected by leprosy. This Technical Guide will prove a useful re-orientation and familiarisation tool for managers, trainers and supervisors in leprosy control or rehabilitation programmes responsible for introducing and managing CBR.

World Leprosy Day this year falls just before the opening of the 17th International Leprosy Congress being held in Hyderabad, India. This Congress, held every five years, represents an important opportunity for all those working in leprosy to come together to share their experiences and wisdom and to renew their commitment to continue their collaborative efforts in working for a world without leprosy.

On behalf of the 14 Members of ILEP, I can assure all our partners that we remain fully committed to the vision of a World Without Leprosy and that we intend to continue addressing leprosy and all of its consequences as long as is necessary. We remain convinced of the need to continue working tirelessly together with all our partners to ensure that effective leprosy activities are sustained wherever they are needed. This will require the continued integration of leprosy control activities with other health services. It will require the continued provision of training for all health workers. And since the close links between poverty, exclusion and leprosy are already well documented, our support will continue to be channelled into preventing disability, and promoting socio-economic rehabilitation and community development in a spirit of partnership with leprosy affected persons.

And so, on this occasion of World Leprosy Day, let us all celebrate our successes. But let us also 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 handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'R' followed by a horizontal line and a diagonal stroke.

Mr Rigo Peeters
President of ILEP