

## PRESS RELEASE

### **“Don’t forget leprosy” campaign gathers pace as World Leprosy Day approaches**

Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative is collaborating with 32 organizations from 13 countries to promote the message “Don’t forget leprosy” in the run-up to World Leprosy Day on January 30. The international campaign includes awareness-raising events and outreach to governments, and is being publicized via newspapers, television, radio and social media.

Based in Tokyo, Japan, Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative launched the “Don’t forget leprosy” campaign in August 2021 to ensure that efforts against leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, are not sidelined amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Taking part are NGOs, organizations of persons affected by leprosy, research institutes and government agencies from Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Kingdom. (See Chart 1)

The Initiative’s Yohei Sasakawa, who serves as WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, said: “The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been particularly hard on persons affected by leprosy and their families who were in a vulnerable situation to begin with. Lockdowns and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus have caused many problems at the field level, making access to medical services difficult, causing loss of livelihoods and exacerbating the difficulties that persons affected by leprosy already encounter due to stigma and discrimination. They must not be forgotten.”



(Caption) Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation, has served as WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination since 2001. He is part of Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative, which has organized the “Don’t forget leprosy” campaign.

From India, which accounts for around 60% of all new cases of leprosy diagnosed globally each year, 8 organizations are participating. Activities include intensive awareness-raising events aimed at school children and university students to provide young people with correct knowledge about leprosy and help prevent discrimination from taking root.

In Brazil, the country with the second-highest number of annual new cases and which has yet to eliminate leprosy as a public health problem (with elimination defined as a prevalence rate of less than 1 case per 10,000 population), the campaign is being carried out by more than 2,000 persons affected by leprosy and volunteers from MORHAN (the Movement for the Reintegration of Persons Affected by Hansen's Disease). Activities include a focus on healthcare professionals and involve training local public health nurses, strengthening the functions of leprosy referral centers and case-finding.

### **Activities for World Leprosy Day by Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative**

The Initiative has launched a special website (<https://gasasakawa.org/>) for the Global Appeal to End Stigma and Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy. Inaugurated by WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa in 2006 and released in conjunction with World Leprosy Day, the annual Global Appeal underlines the messages that leprosy is curable, treatment is available free of charge throughout the world, and that social discrimination has no place.

As side events of this year's Global Appeal, the Initiative is hosting two webinars on raising awareness of leprosy ("The role of health professionals at the grassroots level" and "The role of young people: sharing discussions from three regions") as well as a photo contest on social media. A selection of the best photos, which depict the daily lives of persons affected by leprosy and relief activities, will be displayed on the Global Appeal website.

In addition, WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa has posted a message for World Leprosy Day on the WHO website (<https://www.who.int/news/item/10-01-2022-message-for-world-leprosy-day-2022>).

### **About Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative**

The Initiative is a strategic alliance between WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination Yohei Sasakawa, The Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Health Foundation for achieving a world without leprosy and problems related to the disease. Since 1975, The Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Health Foundation have supported the national leprosy programs of endemic countries through the WHO, with support totaling some US\$200 million to date. In cooperation with the Japanese government and other partners, the foundations have played an important role advocating with the United Nations, helping to secure a 2010 UN General Assembly resolution on elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members and

the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on leprosy by the UN Human Rights Council in 2017.

See the Initiative's home page for further details. <https://sasakawaleprosyinitiative.org/latest-updates/initiative-news/1241/>

### **About leprosy**

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is an infectious disease that mainly affects the skin and peripheral nerves. Around 200,000 cases are newly reported each year. Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy, but left untreated can result in permanent disability. An estimated 3 to 4 million people in the world today are thought to be living with some form of disability as a result of leprosy. Although completely curable, many myths and misunderstandings surround the disease. In various parts of the world, patients, those who have been treated and cured, and even their family members continue to be stigmatized. The discrimination they face limits their opportunities for education, employment and full participation in society.

**Chart1: List of participating organizations**

<b>No</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Type of organization</b>	<b>Participating organization</b>	<b>Supporting organization</b>
1	India	NGO	Acworth Leprosy Hospital Society for Research, Rehabilitation & Education in Leprosy	
2	India	People's Organization	Association of People Affected by Leprosy (APAL)	
3	India	People's Organization	Atma Swabhiman	
4	India	NGO	Greater Tenali Leprosy Treatment and Education Scheme Society (GRETNALTES)	
5	India	NGO	Sasakawa-India Leprosy Foundation (S-ILF)	
6	India	NGO	St Joseph Leprosy Hospital	Father Muller Charitable Institutions
7	India	NGO	NLR India Foundation	
8	Brazil	People's Organization	Morhan	
9	Indonesia	Research organization	Eijkman Oxford Clinical Research Unit / University of Oxford	Papua Health Research and Development Center-MoH Indonesia
10	Indonesia	People's Organization	PerMaTa South Sulawesi	Yayasan Dedikasi Tjipta Indonesia
11	Bangladesh	People's Organization	Advancing Leprosy and disadvantaged peoples Opportunities society (ALO)	The Leprosy Mission (TLM)- Bangladesh

12	Nepal	NGO	The Leprosy Mission Nepal	IDEA Nepal
13	Papua New Guinea	NGO	The Leprosy Mission Papua New Guinea (TLM PNG)	
14	Nigeria	People's Organization	IDEA Nigeria	Leprosy and Tuberculosis Initiative Nigeria
15	Nigeria	People's Organization	Purple Hope Initiative Nigeria (pHIN)	German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association (GLRA)- Nigeria
16	Nigeria	NGO	The Leprosy Mission (TLM)-Nigeria	
17	Sierra Leone	People's Organization	National Association of Persons Affected by Leprosy (NAPAL)	German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association (GLRA)- Sierra Leone
18	Senegal	People's Organization	Association Senegalaise de Lutte Contre la Lepre et les Maladies Tropicales Negligees (ASCL/MTN)	German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association (GLRA)- Senegal
19	Tanzania	NGO/People's Organization	Tanzania Leprosy Association (TLA)	
20	Uganda	NGO	Uganda National Alliance against Leprosy (UNALEP)	German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association (GLRA)- Uganda
21	Portugal	Governmental organization	Centro de Medicina de Reabilitação da Região Centro - Rovisco Pais	
22	UK	NGO	The Leprosy Mission International (TLMI)	

Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative

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