



Press Release

Global Appeal 2026: Education as the Key to Ending Leprosy Stigma and Discrimination — Launch Event in Brussels Will Be Live-Streamed Worldwide —

Jan. 28, 2026 / -- The transformative power of education in replacing fear with knowledge and prejudice with empathy lies at the heart of the Global Appeal 2026 to End Stigma and Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy.

**GLOBAL
APPEAL**
to End Stigma and Discrimination
against Persons Affected by Leprosy
29 JANUARY 2026
BrusselsBELGIUM



The appeal will be launched at a ceremony in Brussels, Belgium, on Thursday, 29 January 2026. The event is being co-hosted by Education International and the Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative, in partnership with the Damien Foundation.

Since its establishment by the Initiative in 2006, the Global Appeal has been an annual call to action, aiming to mobilize different sectors of society—ranging from religious leaders and Nobel laureates to nurses and legal professionals—to sign a collective pledge to eliminate the social barriers surrounding leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease.

Although leprosy is often perceived as a disease of the past, it remains a health and human rights issue. In 2024, 172,717 new cases were reported from 133 countries. Millions of people worldwide live with leprosy-related disabilities, a reality that continues to fuel stigma and discrimination.

Addressing the misconceptions that perpetuate this injustice requires the transformative power of education. This is the message that Education International delivers through the Global Appeal 2026. As the global voice of teachers and education workers, Education International pledges to use its collective voice to promote knowledge, empathy and action,

working toward a society in which the dignity of all individuals is upheld.

The launch event, which will be live-streamed worldwide, will bring together persons affected by leprosy, educators, policymakers, healthcare professionals, education unions, and civil society organizations, to reaffirm their shared commitment to dignity, inclusion and the principle of leaving no one behind.

The event will feature testimonials from persons affected by leprosy from Brazil, India, Indonesia and Senegal whose stories highlight the persistence of stigma even after medical cure. There will also be a panel discussion and a multi-stakeholder dialogue.

On the morning of the event, a delegation of persons affected by leprosy and participating stakeholders shall be received in audience by Her Majesty Queen Mathilde of the Belgians.

Time: 13:30 – 18:30 (CET)

Program: <https://sasakawaleprosyinitiative.org/latest-updates/initiative-news/6359/>

Streaming URL: <https://eur.cvent.me/vvlkdx>

About leprosy

Leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, is an infectious disease that primarily affects the skin and peripheral nerves. In 2024, 172,717 new cases were reported worldwide. Although leprosy is curable, delayed diagnosis and treatment can result in permanent disability.

Beyond the physical toll, many people who have experienced leprosy continue to face deep-seated stigma and systemic discrimination, which prevents them from participating fully in society.

About Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative

The Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative is a strategic alliance of WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa, the Sasakawa Health Foundation, and The Nippon Foundation for achieving a world without leprosy and problems related to the disease.

Since 1975, the Initiative has contributed over US\$200 million to support national leprosy programs through the WHO. It is also committed to empowering persons affected by leprosy and their organizations. The Initiative has played a key role in raising leprosy as a human rights issue at the UN, resulting in several resolutions to eliminate discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their families.

About Education International

Education International is the Global Union Federation that brings together organizations of teachers and other education employees from across the world. Through our 375 member organizations, we represent more than 33 million teachers and education support personnel in 180 countries and territories.

About Damien Foundation

Damien Foundation is a Belgian medical non-profit organization that works to support people with **tuberculosis** and skin-related neglected tropical diseases such as **leprosy** and **leishmaniasis**.

For over 60 years, we have shared this expertise in the area of **public health** by building solid partnerships wherever we go, to support vulnerable populations and help **advance research**. We work to strengthen healthcare systems in support of, and at the request of, the national authorities of 13 countries.

Our mission is to provide **equal access** to robust health services throughout the world including Belgium, ensuring that no one suffers or dies from diseases that can be **prevented and cured**.