

National Conference on Leprosy – Major Recommendations (17 April 2015)

A one-day National Conference on Leprosy was organized by the National Human Rights Commission at Vigyan Bhawan Annexe, New Delhi on 17 April 2015. The main objectives of the Conference were to: (i) follow up of the suggestions/recommendations of National Conference on Leprosy organized by National Human Rights Commission on 18 September 2012; and (ii) address issues of concerns related to Leprosy and suggest appropriate strategies to deal with them.

2. The Conference was inaugurated by Justice Shri K. G. Balakrishnan, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission. Before the inaugural address of Justice Shri Balakrishnan, Shri Bhanu Pratap Sharma, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India gave a brief account of the steps taken by the Government in containing the problem of leprosy in the country.

3. The Conference deliberated upon three major themes in three plenary sessions. These plenary sessions were as follows:

Session-I: Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy: Follow up on Earlier Suggestions/Recommendations of NHRC on Leprosy

Chair: Shri S. C. Sinha, Member, NHRC

4. In this session, six presentations were made by State representatives of Governments of Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Session-II: Leprosy: Existing Status, Future Outlook and Challenges

Chair: Justice Shri Cyriac Joseph, Member, NHRC

5. The session focused on "Trends, Current Status, Future Outlook and Initiatives of Gol" and "Discriminatory Laws: Need for Amendment". The resource persons who spoke on "Trends, Current Status, Future Outlook and Initiatives of Gol" were Dr. C. M. Aggarwal, Deputy Director General, Leprosy, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Gol, New Delhi, Dr. Dharmendra Kumar, Director, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Institute of Physically Handicapped, New Delhi and Shri S. S.

Gupta, Deputy Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Gol, New Delhi. Shri O. Venkateswarlu, Deputy Legal Adviser, Department of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice, Gol, New Delhi spoke on "Discriminatory Laws : Need for Amendment".

Session – III: Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy: Issues of Concern on Field Experiences

Chair: Justice Shri D. Murugesan, Member, NHRC

6. The session focused on three important topics – (i) "Important Medical Facts about Leprosy", (ii) "Issues of Discrimination Concerning Leprosy Affected Persons and Their Families Relating to Education, Food, Employment, Housing, Health and Sanitation" and (iii) "Other Concerns Relating to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Impacting on Leprosy Affected Persons".

7. The "Important Medical Facts about Leprosy" was addressed by Dr. Saurabh Jain, National Professional Officer, Leprosy and Neglected Tropical Diseases, World Health Organization, New Delhi. "Issues of Discrimination Concerning Leprosy Affected Persons and Their Families Relating to Education, Food, Employment, Housing, Health and Sanitation" was dealt by Dr. P. K. Gopal, President, IDEA INDIA, Erode, Tamil Nadu. Dr. Sunil Anand, Director, The Leprosy Mission Trust India, New Delhi spoke on "Other Concerns Relating to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Impacting on Leprosy Affected Persons".

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

8. Based on the deliberations held in the three plenary sessions, the following recommendations were made in the National Conference:

1. There is need for vigorous dissemination of recommendations of the Conference organized by NHRC earlier on the issue of leprosy on 18 September 2012 for proper implementation by all concerned authorities. SHRCs involvement in implementation of recommendations of 2012 Conference and present Conference is a must, then only implementation is possible.

2. The detailed recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions of Rajya Sabha in its 131st Report should be followed up for implementation. The Action Taken Report of the Government(s) covered in the 138th Report of the Committee of Petition indicates that a large number of recommendations have still not been completely implemented. Hence, there is need to take up these recommendations for logical conclusion especially those relating to social and economic discrimination of leprosy affected persons and their families.
3. There is need to suitably address the issue of disability certificate to leprosy affected persons by evolving a separate set of criteria even when they do not fulfil the minimum disability of 40 per cent. The Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities should revisit the guidelines issued on the subject in 2001 and also hold special camps for leprosy affected persons for distribution of disability certificate to them.
4. There is need to explore a sub quota of reservations in jobs for leprosy affected persons. In aggregate 5 per cent reservation may be provided for in the pending Bill for Persons with Disabilities.
5. In order to empower children of leprosy affected persons, there is need to provide free school education and free higher education to them. The children of leprosy affected parents need utmost help for their proper education. If the second generation is uplifted through education and employment, the poverty circle of the family would be broken and their quality of life will improve.
6. The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment have educational promotion scheme for persons with disabilities. These schemes need to be extended to children of persons affected with disabilities in view of the stigma and discrimination they face.
7. Centre and State Governments should elicit the support of the corporate sector in adopting leper colonies for rehabilitation and empowerment of the leprosy affected persons and their families under their corporate social responsibility.