UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

# Report of the Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) and their family members,

**Strengthening international cooperation and solidarity to protect the rights of persons affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease)" (A/HRC/59/55)**

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# What is in this report

# 1. About the report

This report is about the need to strengthen international cooperation and solidarity to protect the rights of persons affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) and their families. The report calls for a human rights-based approach, not charity. It emphasizes the importance of dignity, participation, and ethical solidarity. It gives guidance to governments, donors, and international organizations on how to work together to fund projects that protect the rights of persons affected by leprosy.

The United Nations is a group of 193 countries that work together to make sure that the rights of every person in the world are protected.

In 2017 the United Nations approved the creation of the Mandate on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy (Hansen´s disease) and their family members.

The Special Rapporteur is Beatriz Miranda-Galarza. Her work is to promote the defence of the rights of persons affected by leprosy/Hansen's disease and their family members by advocating and providing information to governments, international organizations, and UN bodies and offices.

As part of her work, she presents two reports about the rights of persons affected by leprosy a year. One in New York and another in Geneva.

To write them she consults governments, local and international organizations of persons affected, as well as experts in different topics related to leprosy.

The terms 'leprosy' and 'Hansen's disease' are used in these reports as they are commonly used by persons affected worldwide.

This report focuses on making sure persons affected are treated as equal human beings with rights.

# 2. Why is international support important?

Leprosy **mostly affects poor and excluded communities**. People still face a lot of discrimination, fear, and lack of support.

Although the disease can be cured, many people:

- Do not get diagnosed on time
- Do not receive the right treatment
- Live with disabilities caused by the disease
- Are excluded from jobs, schools, or their communities

Fighting leprosy requires countries working together to make sure no one is left behind.

# 3. Why is funding a problem?

Persons affected by leprosy shared their experiences:

Many countries and organizations have cut their support for leprosy programs.

This is making things worse, especially in places like Nigeria, where people waited for months without receiving medicine.

There is not enough money for:

- Training doctors and nurses
- Helping people with disabilities
- Supporting families and communities
- Educating people to reduce stigma

# 4. What does international law say?

Countries have legal duties to help each other protect human rights. This includes:

- The right to health
- The right to education
- The right to live without discrimination

The United Nations and other bodies have already agreed on rules to protect persons affected by leprosy. But not enough is being done to follow these rules.

# 5. What happened in the past?

In the past, people with leprosy were often sent to special hospitals or isolated from society.

Religious groups and medical charities tried to help, but they often treated people as poor victims, not as people with rights.

Today, we know that the best approach is to:

- Include affected persons in decisions
- Respect their stories and rights
- End all forms of exclusion

# 6. What progress has been made?

Some good things are happening:

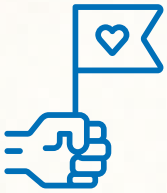
- More people are speaking out and organizing
- Research is helping to improve diagnosis and treatment
- Digital tools are used to share information
- South-South cooperation (for example, Brazil and India helping other countries) is growing

But challenges remain:

- Most decisions are still made without the voices of affected people
- There is little focus on women, mental health, or life after treatment
- Not enough is done to make people feel included and respected

## 7. What do persons affected by leprosy want?

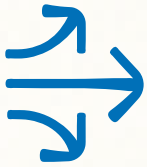
They want:



- A seat at the table – to be part of decisions that affect them
- More funding for health, education, jobs and housing
- Respect for their experiences and history
- End to laws and practices that isolate or punish them
- Stronger health systems that don't forget about them

## 8. What should governments and organizations do?

Governments should:



- Guarantee healthcare, medicine, and support
- Include people affected in national policies
- Work together across borders
- Repeal discriminatory laws

Donors and international groups should:

- Fund more than just medicine, also fund inclusion, housing, mental health, and education

• Support organizations led by persons affected

• Focus on justice and equality, not charity

Grassroots and community organizations should:

• Share experiences and work together

• Ask to be included in funding decisions

• Use technology and storytelling to raise awareness

## 9. Final message from the report

Leprosy is not just a medical issue, it is a human rights issue.

People affected by leprosy deserve respect, participation, and dignity.

We must act together, in solidarity, to end discrimination and ensure that no one is forgotten.

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