

PRESS RELEASE

Declaration of elimination of leprosy as a public health problem in Nepal

On Tuesday 19th January 2010, The Honourable Minister of Health & Population, Government of Nepal, Mr. Uma Kant Chaudhary declared elimination of Leprosy as a public health problem at a declaration ceremony in Kathmandu. The ceremony was graced by The WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Elimination of Leprosy, His Excellency Mr. Yohei Sasakawa as a special guest. The ceremony was also attended by distinguished delegates from The Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, officials from the Ministry of Health & Population, Government of Nepal, Dr. Sumana Barua, Regional Advisor, Leprosy Elimination Programme of WHO-SEARO, Ambassadors from different countries, External Development Partners, International and National Non Government Organizations and media persons.

Dr. G. D. Thakur, Director of Epidemiology and Disease Control Division and Leprosy Control Division in his presentation mentioned that elimination of Leprosy as a public health problem is defined as prevalence rate of below 1 per 10,000 population at the national level. At the end of December 2009 Nepal achieved elimination with 2445 leprosy cases under treatment and prevalence rate of 0.89 per 10,000 population.

Major collaborative partners of the leprosy program in the country have been the World Health Organization, Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, The Nippon Foundation, Netherlands Leprosy Relief, The Leprosy Mission, International Nepal Fellowship, Nepal Leprosy Trust, and many others.

Elimination of leprosy as a public health problem has been achieved in Nepal by implementation of community awareness programmes aimed at early leprosy cases detection, expansion of the services to community level, reduction of stigma attached to the disease and provision of free Multi Drug Therapy (MDT) for treatment. Special interventions for case detection were undertaken in the high endemic districts.

Dr Alexander Andjaparidze, WHO Representative to Nepal acknowledged the support of the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation and H.E. Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for leprosy elimination for his constant patronship and guidance for achieving leprosy elimination in Nepal. He said, "When envisioning the future of public health in Nepal, we can and should dare to dream of victories that greatly benefit all citizens and have a real impact on the human development. The program should continue with the same intensity to further reduce the disease burden, especially in the endemic districts. Our goal is Leprosy Free Nepal and control, eliminate and eradicate other diseases prevalent in Nepal."

The WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Elimination of Leprosy, His Excellency Mr. Yohei Sasakawa expressed his happiness on achievement of the important milestone of leprosy elimination in Nepal. Mr Sasakawa highlighted the challenge to sustain the quality of leprosy services and the need to ensure that all persons affected with leprosy, where ever they live, have an equal opportunity to receive adequate treatment. Mr. Sasakawa appreciated the role of media in achieving elimination in Nepal and appealed for their support in reducing social stigma and discrimination against the people affected by leprosy and their families.

The country requires renewed commitment from all partners to sustain the achievement and progress towards prevention and control of other communicable diseases.