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PRESS RELEASE

Timor-Leste declares elimination of leprosy as a public health problem

DR. Nelson Martins, MD, MPH, PhD
 Ministro da Saúde

23rd March 2011, Dili, Timor-Leste: Leprosy has been declared eliminated as a public health problem in Timor-Leste by His Excellency, Dr Ramos Horta, Honourable President of the Government of Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, at a declaration ceremony in Dili today.

Among those who attended the ceremony were H.E. Dr Nelson Martins; Minister for Health, Timor-Leste, Mr Tatsuya Tanami, Executive Director, The Nippon Foundation representing Mr Yohei Sasakawa the WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Elimination of Leprosy, and Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Deputy Regional Director, World Health Organization Regional Office for South-east Asia. It was also attended by distinguished officials from the Ministry of Health, Government of Timor-Leste, Ambassadors, Development Partners, International and National Non Government Organizations and media persons.

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Deputy Regional Director of WHO-SEARO stated, "This is an important milestone. With Timor-Leste achieving this goal, all countries in Asia have now eliminated leprosy as a public health problem." She added, "WHO is committed to continuing the programme with the same intensity to further reduce the disease burden, especially in the three remaining endemic districts, i.e. Oe-cusse, Baucau and Viqueque." She acknowledged the support of the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation and Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for leprosy elimination for his constant support.

Mr Tatsuya Tanami, on behalf of Mr Yohei Sasakawa, expressed his happiness on achievement of the important milestone of leprosy elimination in Timor-Leste. He 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.

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

Elimination of leprosy as a public health problem is defined as a prevalence rate lower than 1 per 10,000 population at the national level. At the end of December 2010 Timor-Leste achieved elimination with 78 leprosy cases under treatment and prevalence rate of 0.73 per 10,000 population. The programme to eliminate leprosy commenced in 2003 with the World Health Organization, Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, The Nippon Foundation, and The Leprosy Mission International as the major collaborative partners.

Elimination of leprosy as a public health problem has been achieved in Timor-Leste by implementation of comprehensive programme, the major components of which were to train health

staff in the detection and treatment of leprosy; to actively look for cases and provide a continuous, uninterrupted supply of Multi Drug Therapy (MDT) to those patients.

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