

**Oral statement by International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP)
WHO Western Pacific Regional Committee: October 2020**

Persons affected by leprosy are consistently among the most left behind. Their wellbeing is negatively affected not only by the physically disabling effects of leprosy but, even more, by discriminatory attitudes to the disease. Leprosy affected individuals and families, already facing social exclusion, poverty and poor health outcomes, are now deeply impacted by the crisis generated by COVID-19.

ILEP collaborated in a survey of persons affected by leprosy, in many countries, on their main concerns around COVID-19. They consistently spoke of lack of access to healthcare, basic goods, government support and information about the pandemic. ILEP recommends that governments support grassroots organizations of persons affected by leprosy and liaise with them to not only share information about COVID-19 solutions and resources, but also to develop strategies for improving health outcomes and fostering social inclusion for those most left behind.

Regarding transition to the 'new normal', ILEP appreciates the 27 July guidance published by WHO-NTDs but notes that this guidance is focused mainly on MDA and active case-finding. We recommend urgent action to provide guidance on the NTDs, like leprosy, that involve intensive disease management. Advice is needed on safe delivery of prompt diagnosis and treatment, management of complications, surgical programmes, effective self-care, provision of assistive devices, therapeutic counseling and referral to community-based rehabilitation.

We believe that innovative approaches need to be considered, to ensure ongoing access to the continuum of care during the pandemic. These include:

- Increasing the use of digital technology in leprosy control activities, especially in hard-to reach places
- Increasing use of mobile phones for diagnosis, advice on ulcer care and complications, and other forms of follow-up including counselling

Thank you for your attention