

UPR Pre-session statement on Papua New Guinea, October 2021
Delivered by International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP)

This statement by the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP) is also on behalf of The Leprosy Mission Papua New Guinea, the PNG Disability Sector Coalition and the PNG Assembly of Disabled Persons. The statement is about the rights of persons with disabilities, including persons affected by leprosy. It addresses the legislative framework, the absence of a National Human Rights Institution, the need for a Vision 2050 disability champion, and access to health and rehabilitation services.

First, legislation. In the 2016 UPR, five states recommended that Papua New Guinea should fully implement the UNCRPD Convention. The Convention requires states to pass legislation that implements the rights recognized in the Convention, and to change laws that discriminate against persons with disabilities. Some steps have been taken, including drafting of a Disability Bill. But the Bill has not been passed into law. Meanwhile, the Discriminatory Practices Act 1963 forbids discrimination on bases such as colour and tribal origin, but not on the basis of disability. And the deeply offensive Suppression of Leprosy Ordinance 1923 continues to dehumanise persons affected by leprosy, labelling them as lepers and unjustly calling for their segregation.

We urge the Government, without delay, to pass the Disability Bill into law, to repeal the Leprosy Ordinance 1923, and to amend the Discriminatory Practices Act 1963 to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of disability.

Second, in 2016, 13 states recommended that Papua New Guinea establish a National Human Rights Institution. The Government stated its intention to do so, but it has not done so. The lack of an NHRI denies persons with disabilities, including persons affected by leprosy, an officially recognised platform to monitor the human rights environment as it affects them, and to promote effective implementation of international human rights standards. It also denies a venue to raise complaints about stigmatizing and discriminatory behaviour.

We urge the Government, without delay, to establish a National Human Rights Institution in accordance with the Paris Principles.

Third, Vision 2050. ILEP commends the Government's vision of a smart, wise, fair and happy society. ILEP agrees that people with disabilities have been totally invisible in the development process, that they are among the most vulnerable and marginalised in society, and that they should be empowered, their rights recognized, and included in the mainstream of social and economic life. But only 2 of the 80 pages of the Vision 2050 strategy even mention disability, though it affects 10-15% of citizens. Persons with disabilities have reason to be sceptical about the possibility of real change.

We urge the Government to appoint and suitably resource a Vision 2050 Disability Champion, who will work with civil society to ensure that Vision 2050 programmes are disability-inclusive and reflect the commitment to ensure access to disability rights.

Finally, health and rehabilitation. In Papua New Guinea, well over 90% of persons with disabilities, including persons affected by leprosy, have no access to the small number of disability rehabilitation centres, nor to community-based rehabilitation programmes, nor to assistive technology. These services are crucial for inclusive development including, for example, education and sustainable livelihoods.

We urge the Government to double the number of disability rehabilitation centres (equipped with assistive technology), to promote community-based rehabilitation through partnership with local NGOs, and to provide healthcare professionals with ongoing training and information to equip them to deliver the best possible care to persons with disability and leprosy.

Thank you.