

## **Maldives' responses to the Questionnaire by the Special Rapporteur on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Persons Affected by Leprosy and their Family Members**

### **1. Please provide information on measures, including laws, affirmative policies and public-private partnerships, taken to guarantee equal job opportunities to persons affected by leprosy and their family members and ensure their right to decent work and inclusion in the formal labor market.**

- 1.1. Leprosy has been eliminated in the Maldives as a public health burden in 1997. At present, there are only 9 (nine) active cases of leprosy nationwide, of which none have reported grade II disabilities. With high treatment completion rates, and no grade II disabilities, issues of discrimination in terms of inclusion in the formal labour market is rare, if not non-existent. However, social stigma towards leprosy as a disease is still prevalent. The Maldives Zero Leprosy Programme, launched on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2019, aims to tackle this issue.
- 1.2. Protection is afforded to persons affected by leprosy and their families under the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, as well as Law No: 2/2008 (Employment Act). Article 17 of the Constitution states that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms stated in Chapter 2 of the Constitution (which includes the right to work), without discrimination of any kind, including race, national origin, colour, sex, age, mental or physical disability, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status, or native island.
- 1.3. Furthermore, Section 4 of the Employment Act, prohibits the discrimination amongst persons carrying out equal work either in the granting of employment, determination of remuneration, increase in remuneration, provision of training, determination of conditions and manner of employment, dismissal from employment or resolution of other employment related matters, based on race, colour, social standing, religion, political beliefs or affiliation with any political party, sex, marital status, family obligations, and in so far as it does not contravene the provisions in the Act, age or disability. This prohibits any discrimination based on an individual's leprosy status.
- 1.4. Subsection (b) of section 4 of the Act further provides that the implementation of any principles, activities, or programs by employers to prioritize persons who have disabilities and/or are socially disadvantaged will not be considered as discrimination.
- 1.5. In addition to this, Maldives has universal health insurance that covers a plethora of primary care services. The country's health scheme is run by a State-owned company,

*Aasandha*, and all medical issues are State-sponsored. While leprosy medication is provided free of cost from the World Health Organization (WHO), external costs pertaining to leprosy treatment is covered by the Government. This ensures that leprosy treatment does not become a financial burden on the citizens and that they can live a normal life among their family and friends and can continue to attend work.

1.6. Few old leprosy cases with record of grade II disability are above the age of 65 years and are provided to Senior Citizen Allowance (SCA), which is MVR 5,000 (approximately USD 324). A disability allowance of MVR 2,000 (approximately USD 131) is also provided to people assessed by the Government as having a disability.

**2. Please provide information on social benefits put in place to respond specifically to the humanitarian crisis faced by persons affected and their families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

2.1. No specific social benefits were put in place to respond specifically to those affected by leprosy during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are entitled to the same social benefits as others. This includes unemployment benefits up to MVR 5,000 (approximately USD 324) per month for those who have lost their jobs or had their incomes from self-employment reduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2. However, measures were put in place to ensure that all in need, including persons diagnosed with leprosy can access to the healthcare they require during the lockdowns and restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes issuance of 2 (two) months leprosy medications to patients, teleconsultations to identify any difficulties and regular check-ins on the health of such patients.

**3. Please provide information on how the situation of persons affected by leprosy and their family members is taken into consideration in your COVID-19 recovery plans.**

3.1. No specific consideration was given to persons affected by leprosy and their family members in the COVID-19 recovery plans. However, their conditions are monitored closely and effectively by the Health Protection Agency and any leprosy related difficulties are identified and attended to without delay. Special consideration was, however, given to all vulnerable groups, to ensure that they are provided food, shelter, medical assistance and income support, in order to mitigate the adverse impacts of the pandemic on human rights.