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On World Leprosy Day ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton highlights the vital role of nurses in the treatment and de-stigmatisation of the condition

Geneva, Switzerland, 24 January 2020 – The stigma that accompanies a diagnosis of leprosy must be addressed through community-wide action, which nurses can play an important role in.

Leprosy is a condition that carries with it a unique burden of stigma. As the World Health Organization (WHO) has said, negative attitudes towards people with the condition, which is also known as Hansen’s disease, are major barriers to detecting it early, stopping the associated deformities and disabilities, and preventing the disease’s spread.

Despite progress in recent years, there are still around 200,000 new cases of leprosy each year, more than half of which are in India, with significant numbers elsewhere in South-East Asia, Brazil, sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific.

Marking World Leprosy Day, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh has called for countries that are affected by leprosy to strengthen and scale up their core public health interventions, which have proven to be successful.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said nurses, many of whom work in primary health care, are ideally placed to help minimise the consequences of leprosy and enable patients to live their lives to the full.

Mr Catton said: “Around the world nurses are in a strong position to help people with leprosy to access early treatment and prevent the debilitating long-term consequences of this condition. They can also work with communities to educate the public and reduce the stigma and disadvantages that make the disease more debilitating than it need be.”

He said nurses have a distinguished history in looking after people who have been shunned by the societies they live in, citing the example of Austrian nurses Marianne and Margaritha. There is a campaign to have them nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for their selfless efforts to care for people with leprosy in Korea, unpaid, over a 39-year period.

Mr Catton added: “Marianne and Margaritha dedicated their lives to the service of others less fortunate than themselves. Theirs was an enormous act of humanity, of caring and compassion, but more than that, they broke the taboos that existed at the time. We can’t think of a better way to recognise nursing and its contribution to humanity than to have two wonderful nurses honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize in the Year of the Nurse.”

Click [here](#) to see Mr Catton’s video in support of Marianne and Margaritha’s nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

For details of the one million signature campaign to have Marianne and Margaritha nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize go to mm.kna.or.kr

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Note to Editors

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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