



SIAH-180609

June 28, 2018

H.E. Minister Matteo Salvini  
Deputy Prime Minister of Italy  
Minister of the Interior

Your Excellency,

Felicitations from Japan. I write to you in my capacity as WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination and Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of People Affected by Leprosy.

It has come to my attention that in a remark made by Your Excellency, which I learned from a recent media report, you likened rising nationalism to leprosy. This is a most unfortunate analogy as it promotes misconceptions, draws on deeply ingrained negative stereotypes of leprosy, and reinforces discrimination against people affected by the disease and their families.

While I am completely certain that it was not your intention in any way to reinforce the stigma against leprosy or to cause anguish to people affected by the disease, I fear this will have been the result. As your words have such reach and influence, I beseech Your Excellency to be sensitive in your choice of language.

Despite the fact that the disease is now completely curable, people affected by leprosy in some parts of the world continue to be stigmatized and discriminated against. In order to uphold the human rights of those affected by leprosy, in December 2010, the UN General Assembly unanimously, including Italy, adopted a resolution approving principles and guidelines on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.

I would like to take this opportunity to humbly request Your Excellency to reflect on the situation of those affected by leprosy and to help promote the principles of the UN resolution.

Respectfully yours,

Yohei Sasakawa  
Chairman, The Nippon Foundation  
WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination  
Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy

cc: H.E. Ambassador Giorgio Starace, Embassy of Italy in Tokyo  
H.E. Ambassador Keiichi Katakami, Embassy of Japan in Rome