

***Report on Ram Naik's Petition for Empowerment of Leprosy Affected Persons
Submitted to Rajya Sabha***

Mumbai, Friday: Sustenance Allowance of Rs. 2000/- per person per month to Leprosy Affected Persons (LAPs), Free Medical Facilities in their self-settled colonies, Free Civic Amenities like water, electricity, drainage etc., and Free Education to the dependant children of (LAP) unto vocational and degree courses etc. are the important recommendations included in the report submitted today to the Rajya Sabha by Shri. M. Venkaiah Naidu, Chairman, Committee on Petitions of Rajya Sabha. This information is given by Shri Ram Naik, former Petroleum Minister, in a press statement issued today in Mumbai.

Shri Ram Naik, along with Dr. P. K. Gopal (President, National Forum of Leprosy, Tamilnadu), Dr. Sharad Gokhale (President, International Leprosy Union, Pune), Shri Uday Thakar (Treasurer, Kushthrog Nivaran Samiti, Panvel), Shri Shantaram Bhoir (President, Maharashtra Kushthpidit Sanghatana), and Shri Bhimrao Madhale (President, Sanjay Nagar Rahivasi Sangh, Mumbai) had submitted a petition for medico-socio-economic empowerment of LAPs, on 5th December 2007, to Rajya Sabha through Shri Ved Prakash Goyal, M.P. from Mumbai.

After Processing the petition, the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, forwarded it to the Committee on Petitions, chaired by Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, for further scrutiny. All the petitioners rendered oral evidences before the committee on 10th June 2008. Subsequently, the committee toured and visited several self-settled colonies of LAPs at Mumbai, Hyderabad, Tirupati, Nellore, Chengalpattu, and Chennai. The committee also had interactions with NGOs working with LAPs, State Governments, and Municipal Corporations, before presenting its report to Rajya Sabha today on 24th October 2008.

Elaborating further, Shri Ram Naik said, "LAPs are thrown out of the society and do not have any profession for sustenance. Even after establishing that leprosy is curable and non-contagious, there are 16 Acts which need to be amended, so that LAP can live an honourable life. In order to change the scenerio and also to empower LAPs, myself and other NGOs working in the field, thought that there is a need for formulation of national policy for empowerment of LAPs. As there was no positive response from the central as well as state governments to improve the fate of LAPs, we decided to submit the petition to Rajya Sabha." In addition to the recommendations given in the beginning, the committee has made the following important recommendations:

1. Since the empowerment of LAPs is tossed between the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and Health & Family Welfare, there is a need for well-defined policy for these unfortunate people who are alienated from the mainstream of society. There should also be a one-time multi-centric study to eliminate the burden of leprosy cases. Hence, a fresh survey should be conducted all over the country.

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2. Observing that there are discriminatory provisions in various statutes which hamper the empowerment of LAPs, the concerned Government of India ministries and various state governments should urgently consider amendments to such anachronistic and discriminatory provisions in the concerned legislations.
3. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare in co-ordination with ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Publicity Department of the State Governments should launch a nation-wide campaign advocating the curability of leprosy and humanitarian aspect of LAP. The government should prepare the documentary for dissemination of positive messages across the masses.
4. The society still looks down to the LAPs and they are labeled as leper, leprosy patient, ex-patient, etc. The Committee recommended the use of LAP as dignified expression.
5. In addition to the governmental efforts, all of us need to appreciate that these unfortunate brethren need special care, attention and service from the society. They should not be treated as social out-caste. We should help them keeping in mind the Indian ethos 'Manav Seva is Madhav Seva'.

Shri Ram Naik has profusely thanked Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, Chairman, Petition Committee and other member M.P.s for the compassion and efficiency with which the Committee has submitted their report to the Rajya Sabha. He also hoped that the Government of India as well as State Governments would implement the recommendations in Toto without further delay.

(Office Secretary)