



*The Permanent Representative of Italy
to the International Organizations
Geneva*

Prot. 0960
Geneva, 7 August 2020

Dear Ms. Balbin,

Following UN Letter, dated June 10, 2020, I have the honor to submit Italy's reply to the Communication by UN Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their families.

Should additional information be made available, allow me to ensure you that we will promptly share it with you.

Please accept, Ms. Balbin, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Gian Lorenzo Cornado

Ms Beatriz Balbin
Chief of the Special Procedures Branch
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

**ITALY'S REMARKS,
IN RESPONSE TO COMMUNICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST PERSONS AFFECTED BY LEPROSY AND THEIR FAMILY
MEMBERS, DATED JUNE 10, 2020**

August 6, 2020

ITALY'S REMARKS

Further to the Letter, dated June 10, 2019 (AL ITA 2/2020), sent by UN Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members, Italian Authorities are in a position to provide the following remarks.

Introduction

At the outset, we would like to recall that Italy complies with all relevant Conventions and international instruments that protect human rights and persons affected by leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, and their family members, including, among others: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ICRPD); and the UN Principles and Guidelines for the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons affected by Leprosy and their Family members, adopted in 2010. Moreover, the Italian Government stands firm to always cooperate with all relevant UN Special Procedures.

Against this background, Italian Authorities would like to take this opportunity to highlight that the reference to a 'leper-colony' had no intentional stereotyping content, nor any discriminatory objectives towards persons affected by leprosy. And we wish to thank UN Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members, for recognizing this element at the beginning of her Letter.

Given the very complex situation faced by Italy and the Italian Authorities, since the start of COVID-19, the above reference was only intended to object to some unnecessary policies of closure applied to Italian citizens, services or goods, notwithstanding the drastic extensive measures, which had already been taken by the Italian Government. We therefore regret that the use of this reference may have been misinterpreted or misunderstood, thereby causing an unintentional offence towards a specific vulnerable group.

Turning to specific issues

Italian situation and legislation

In Italy, the relevant epidemiological situation has changed profoundly in the past thirty years. In recent years, greater attention to Hansen's disease surveillance has led to specific reporting of cases to the World Health Organization (12 cases in 2016; 8 cases in 2017; 5 cases in 2018). Moreover, Italian legislation on Hansen's disease basically consists of three measures:

- Ministerial Decree of 15 December 1990, which defines the information system for infectious and transmittable diseases;
- Guidelines for the control of Hansen's disease in Italy, issued in June 1999;
- The Act of Guidance and Coordination (*Atto di indirizzo e coordinamento*) for the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces, on Hansen's disease, as issued in May 2001.

With regard to the information system, it should be recalled that Hansen's disease falls within the third class of the infectious disease notification decree and has a dedicated information flow, which

includes the compilation of an epidemiological form. The above Guidelines constitutes the reference document for the diagnosis, therapy, and management of both the sick and their family contacts.

In the event of a potential case diagnosed in reception Centres, it is recommended to refer the patient to specialized public structures specialized for this relevant disease. The diagnostic-therapeutic pathway is carried out at the Regional Reference Centres (*Centri di Riferimento Regionale*), as envisaged by the above Guidance and Coordination Act 2001. This Act defines the competent structures by differentiating the territorial centres between the ones at a regional level and the National Reference Centres, being four throughout Italy, at Genoa, Cagliari, Gioia del Colle (BA), and Messina, respectively:

- The Genoa laboratory also acts as a supra-regional structure.
- The territorial Centres are tasked with referring the potential cases/patients to the reference centres for confirmation of the diagnosis, implementation of the therapeutic and rehabilitation protocols and the performance of periodic check-ups of both patients and their cohabitants.
- The National Reference Centres, in addition to confirming the diagnosis, establish the therapeutic protocols and the related conclusion, besides notifying the confirmed cases and organizing lifelong learning of the health-care personnel.

Conclusion

The Italian Authorities take this opportunity to reaffirm their full commitment to effectively cooperating with UN Special Procedures and all other relevant international mechanisms.

The Italian Authorities will remain seized of the matter and will provide further elements upon request.