

November 12, 2018

H.E. Emmanuel Macron  
President of the French Republic

Dear President Macron,

Re: 'Nationalist Leprosy'

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

You may recall that on June 28 this year I wrote to you concerning your statement linking rising nationalism to leprosy and urged you to be sensitive in your choice of language, given the stigma and discrimination that continue to surround the disease of leprosy.

It has come to my attention that in an interview with the newspaper *Ouest France* published on October 31 you are quoted as saying: "Europe is facing a risk: that of dismemberment through nationalist leprosy and being pushed over by external powers, and therefore to lose its sovereignty."

I have no doubt that it was not your intention in any way to reinforce the stigma against leprosy or to cause anguish to persons affected by the disease; from my perspective, however, as one who has seen for himself the situation of persons affected by the disease and their families, it is most regrettable that you have chosen to use the disease as a pejorative metaphor. Doing so risks exacerbating all the harmful stereotypes about leprosy and those who suffer from it.

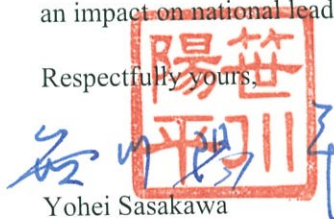
Leprosy can now be cured with drugs. Nevertheless, negative and hurtful perceptions of leprosy that have become deeply ingrained in people's minds over the centuries have not gone away.

In December 2010, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution on "elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members." Principles and guidelines accompanying the resolution urge governments to abolish discriminatory legislation and bring about a change in attitudes toward leprosy.

They also point out that insulting or discriminatory language should be eliminated. May I, therefore, humbly beseech you again not to use leprosy as a label or epithet for something negative or threatening?

I look to you for your understanding and support for my plea, in the knowledge that your words have an impact on national leaders and people around the world.

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 Laurent Pic, Embassy of France in Tokyo  
Mr. Shigeatsu Tominaga, President, Foundation Franco-Japonaise Sasakawa