

## Join UN Special Rapporteur at virtual launch of partnership between Lepra and the University of Essex

UN Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy Alice Cruz is helping launch a new partnership between international charity Lepra and the University of Essex.

The new partnership is looking to help people affected by leprosy and other vulnerable groups throughout the world including India.

Alice Cruz will give the keynote address at the virtual launch event titled 'We will overcome leprosy together'. Her address will be followed by a panel discussion with people affected by leprosy, doctors, scholars, and WHO representatives.

Register for the [Zoom Webinar online](#) and see the [full programme online](#).

Panel members will include representatives from the University of Essex's Institute of Public Health and Wellbeing and Human Rights Centre plus the Blue Peter Public Health and Research Centre in India and the World Health Organization's Regional Office for South-East Asia.

Professor David O'Mahony, the University of Essex's Dean of Partnerships (Research), said: "We're really excited about our partnership with Lepra, and this event will help highlight how together we will be able to work and cooperate on the important work that Lepra delivers across the world in the combat against leprosy.

"There are wide range of opportunities for our respective organisations and for our researchers and students – from undergraduates to PhD students – to benefit from this partnership and we look forward to working together."

Jimmy Innes, Lepra CEO, said, "I'm delighted that we are holding this launch event to celebrate this new partnership between Lepra and the University of Essex. We both share the same physical home in Colchester, and we both come with rich and diverse histories that offer us great complementarity. For Lepra, we relish the chance to work with the university's students and staff, to help engage in our work addressing leprosy in India and Bangladesh, and in pursuit of a world that is free from prejudice and disability due to leprosy."

Lepra and the University of Essex will be collaborating on projects and academic research where Lepra and the University share common interests, to advance the fields of public and global health.

Working together they will address the current and pressing issues such as human rights and advocacy, medical and para-medical science, social science as well as human science.

The event panel will include Mr Rajni Singh, Bihar State Coordinator, Lepra; Dr Aparna Srikantam, Director of Lepra Blue Peter Public Health and Research Centre

in India; and Dr Venkata Ranganadha Rao Pemmaraju, Ag Team leader, Global Leprosy Programme, World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia; and Dr Asrat Mengiste, NTD Technical advisor, Centre for Innovative Drug Development and Therapeutic Trials for Africa, College of Health Sciences Addis Ababa University.

Those attending will also hear testimonials from Ms Manikyamma Kummarapalli, Lab Assistant for Lepra at the Blue Peter Public Health and Research Centre, India, and Businessman and Entrepreneur Mr Md Shah Ajom Shumon, who is a Community Leader and Secretary of Pabna District Federation of the People affected by Leprosy in Bangladesh.

Leprosy is an infectious disease, affecting a person's peripheral nerves, often leaving them with disabilities including the inability to walk, use their hands or see. Leprosy is curable with a course of multi-drug therapy, that is provided free of charge. Due to fear and lack of knowledge, there are over three million people across the world living with undiagnosed leprosy and every day the disease causes more damage to their health, livelihood, and future.

Last year, despite the global pandemic and lockdowns, Lepra directly reached more than 290,000 people through diagnosis, treatment and holistic care. More than 225,000 people were further engaged in their home communities through health education and events to raise awareness of leprosy and other neglected diseases, to reduce transmission and promote wellbeing.

Contact: Alice Heppel, Marketing Lead  
[AliceH@lepra.org.uk](mailto:AliceH@lepra.org.uk)  
01206 216700

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About leprosy**

Leprosy is a communicable disease, caused by bacterium, which affects the skin and peripheral nerves of people. If left undiagnosed or untreated it can cause severe disability. A diagnosis often results in severe prejudice and discrimination. Leprosy can incubate in a human anywhere from 6 months to 20 years; and as a result, it is often difficult to diagnose the disease until it has already caused significant damage.

Millions of people are affected, with numbers continuing to rise. For over 7 million people across the world, leprosy causes damage to their health, livelihoods, and futures. 600 people are diagnosed with leprosy every day and 50 of those are children.

### **About Lepra**

Lepra is a UK-based charity working in India and Bangladesh to change the lives of people affected by leprosy. Established in 1924, the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA) was inaugurated by H.R.H The Prince of Wales at Mansion House in the City of London. We've been known simply as Lepra since 2008. Working in India and Bangladesh, we find, diagnose, treat, and rehabilitate people affected with leprosy with specialists diagnosing leprosy by using skin test patch anaesthesia, skin smears and non-invasive

sensory investigation. We also work tirelessly to fight the prejudice and discrimination they face in their daily lives.

To find out more about our work, look at our website [www.lepra.org.uk](http://www.lepra.org.uk) or via our social media channels



<https://www.facebook.com/LepraUK/>



<https://www.instagram.com/leprauk/?hl=en-gb>



<https://twitter.com/leprauk?s=21>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/lepra>



<https://youtube.com/c/LepraOrgUk>