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Victory Over Leprosy Stigma

TO THE EDITOR:

Workers all over the world fighting for human rights relating to leprosy patients and those concerned about archaic laws strengthening the stigma associated with the disease will rejoice over the unique gesture shown by Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, Prime Minister of Japan, in favor of leprosy sufferers. He made an historic decision not to contest a recent court verdict asking the Japanese government to pay the compensation claimed by leprosy patients incarcerated in Kumomoto asylum. The persons affected by the disease who were subjected to compulsory segregations in sanatoriums were even prevented from having children.

On 24 May 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi was seen on the overseas TV chan-

nel shaking hands with the leprosy patients, and is reported to have even apologized for the government policy, which over the years has led to discrimination, degradation and privation of ostracized subjects.

This courageous act, besides offering hope to persons affected by leprosy, should be an eye opener for governments, legal luminaries and the press as well as the public, and should be a shot in the arm for leprosy workers in India. It is unfortunate that such a significant event has still not received the media publicity which it truly deserves.

—Dr. R. Ganapati

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