

■ EDITORIAL

Leprosy can be eliminated

World Leprosy Day is observed on the last Sunday of every January and this year the theme is: *Leprosy is Curable; the Real Challenge is Stigma*. The Government of Uganda is committed to eliminating leprosy, a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*, which primarily affects the skin, peripheral nerves and mucosal surfaces.

Transmitted through respiratory droplets during close contact, the disease remains curable with multi-drug therapy, which renders patients non-infectious within a week of treatment.

The health ministry's Zero Leprosy Roadmap 2022-2030 targets zero transmission, zero disability and zero stigma by 2030. A lot of progress has been achieved, with districts reporting dropping cases; from 46 in 2022 to 30 in 2024, while total notifications declined from 516 to 189 in the same period.

However, the struggle to eliminate the disease continues. Despite achieving elimination status two decades ago, Uganda still reports about 300 cases annually, underlining the need for sustained efforts.

This can be achieved through prevention, early diagnosis, *Bacillus Calmette-Guérin* vaccination and contact tracing.

Stakeholders must treat the 2030 target as if it were tomorrow.

Improving awareness should be top on the agenda because stigma fuelled by misconceptions about contagion and curability remains the greatest barrier to elimination.

The health ministry deserves recognition for its unwavering commitment, alongside partners like the German Leprosy and TB Relief Association, which has served Uganda since 1961, and the World Health Organisation.

Their collaborative efforts in awareness campaigns, capacity building and patient support have been instrumental.



UGANDA STILL REPORTS ABOUT 300 CASES ANNUALLY, UNDERLINING THE NEED FOR SUSTAINED EFFORTS. THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH PREVENTION...

