



Yohei Sasakawa

WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination

Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy

Leprosy is not a disease of the past. Around 200,000 new cases are still reported worldwide every year. Also known as Hansen's disease, leprosy is curable and early detection and treatment can prevent disability. However, many cases remain hidden, contributing to ongoing transmission.

There is another reason why leprosy persists: stigma and discrimination. Since ancient times, the disease has been the subject of intense discrimination. There are still over 100 discriminatory laws across more than 20 countries.

I often talk about the fight against leprosy in terms of a motorcycle: the front wheel symbolizes curing the disease; the back wheel represents eliminating stigma and discrimination. If the two wheels do not turn together, we will not make progress. In order to solve this medical and human rights issue, we must continue to send the message that leprosy must not be neglected at any time. One such initiative is the "Don't Forget Leprosy" campaign, which I launched during the COVID pandemic.

We have reached the last mile of the fight against leprosy. But the last mile of a 100-mile journey is only halfway—and the last mile will be tougher than the previous 99. So, let us work together towards a leprosy-free world.

Yohei Sasakawa



Spreading the "Don't Forget Leprosy" message from the top of Japan's tallest mountain, Mt. Fuji (3,776 meters) (2022)

Honours

- 2022 WHO Director-General's Award for Global Health
- 2021 Order of Merit in the rank of Grand Officer, Ecuador
- 2019 Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun, Japan
- 2018 Gandhi Peace Prize (Awarded in 2019)
- 2017 Health and Human Rights Award, International Council of Nurses
- 2017 Health-for-All Gold Medal, WHO
- 2014 The Rule of Law Award, International Bar Association

Books

- Shigeki Sakamoto, Takahiro Nanri (Eds.), *Global Impact: Reflections on the Work of Yohei Sasakawa, the WHO's Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2023)
- Yohei Sasakawa, *Making the Impossible Possible: My Work for Leprosy Elimination and Human Rights* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2023)
- Fumihiko Takayama, *The Last and Longest Mile: Yohei Sasakawa's Struggle to Eliminate Leprosy* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2021)
- Yohei Sasakawa, *No Matter Where the Journey Takes Me: One Man's Quest for a Leprosy-Free World* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2019)
- Yohei Sasakawa, *My Struggle against Leprosy* (Tokyo: Festina Lente, 2019)

WHO GOODWILL AMBASSADOR'S
LEPROSY BULLETIN



@SasakawaYohei



**SASAKAWA
LEPROSY
HANSEN'S DISEASE
INITIATIVE**



Role and achievements as WHO Goodwill Ambassador

Yohei Sasakawa has spent some 50 years seeking to eliminate leprosy: he regards this as his life mission. In his role as WHO Goodwill Ambassador, he engages with political leaders, human rights experts, health professionals and media, and regularly visits communities of people affected by leprosy.

Meeting with leaders

As WHO Goodwill Ambassador, Sasakawa has met with more than 600 leaders around the world to advocate for leprosy to be given priority on the health agenda.



Audience with Pope Francis (Vatican, 2023) © Vatican Media



Speech at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Switzerland, 2004)

Advocating for human rights

Sasakawa regards discrimination against persons affected by leprosy as a violation of human rights. His advocacy was instrumental in the adoption of the 2010 UN General Assembly resolution on elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their families and its accompanying principles and guidelines.



Launch of the 18th Global Appeal, endorsed by participants of the International Symposium at the Vatican on Hansen's Disease "Leave No One Behind" (Vatican City, 2023)

Supporting self-advocacy

Sasakawa believes that persons affected by leprosy should play a leading role in the fight against leprosy and has supported their activities and the development of their organizations.



2nd Global Forum of People's Organizations on Hansen's Disease (India, 2022)



Opening ceremony of the new headquarters building of ENAPAL (Ethiopian National Association of Persons Affected by Leprosy) attended by the minister of health, minister of women and social affairs and representatives of ENAPAL. (Ethiopia, 2022)

Raising awareness

Sasakawa raises awareness of leprosy through the media and by organizing conferences, symposiums, workshops and the annual Global Appeal to End Stigma and Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy, which is supported by high-profile individuals and organizations.

Visiting endemic areas

Since his appointment, Sasakawa has visited some 100 countries to hear directly from persons affected by leprosy about issues they face.



Talking with a person affected by leprosy who is undergoing ulcer care (Indonesia, 2016)

Connecting stakeholders

Sasakawa observes activities at the grassroots level and conveys the voices of people affected by leprosy to political and administrative leaders.