

**SASAKAWA**  
**LEPROSY**  
HANSEN'S DISEASE  
**INITIATIVE**



*Towards a leprosy-free world*



## Our story

Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative is a strategic alliance formed in 2020 between WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination Yohei Sasakawa, The Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Health Foundation for the purpose of achieving zero leprosy: a world free from all forms of suffering associated with the disease.

For more than half a century, members of the initiative have worked individually and collectively with a wide range of stakeholders to address medical and social issues related to leprosy.

Since 1975, we have supported the national leprosy programs of endemic countries through the World Health Organization, with contributions totaling over US\$200 million, including funding free distribution of multidrug therapy (MDT) between 1995 and 1999.

From the late 1990s, in the belief that the people affected by leprosy should be the main actors in tackling the problems caused by the disease, we began to support organizations of persons affected by leprosy around the world.

In 2003, we approached the United Nations to take up leprosy as a serious human rights issue. Working with the Japanese government and other partners, our advocacy was instrumental in securing a UN General Assembly resolution on elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members in 2010 and the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on leprosy in 2017.

Furthermore, since the mid-2000s, we have also supported efforts to preserve the history of leprosy for the lessons it can teach future generations.

A former sanatorium at Iranduba, Brazil

## Our Mission, Goals and Strategies towards a leprosy-free world

### Vision

#### Zero leprosy

A world free from all forms of suffering associated with the disease

### Mission

- › Tackle disease
- › Eliminate discrimination
- › Preserve history

### Goals

- › Achieve WHO's numerical targets
- › Improve health technologies and service delivery
- › Empower people's organizations
  - › Reform laws based on Principles and Guidelines
  - › Develop robust networks for history preservation

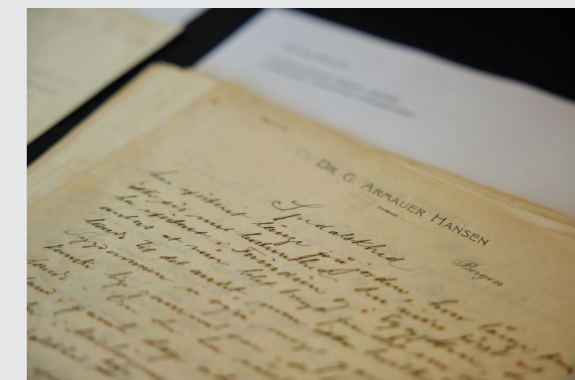
## Strategies

- › Coordinate with WHO Goodwill Ambassador for effective advocacy at all levels
- › Work with WHO and others to support leprosy control activities in high-priority countries
- › Strengthen capacities of people's organizations and promote their involvement in policy-making and implementation
- › Identify discrimination and construct a framework for sustaining action toward its elimination
- › Support model history preservation efforts and facilitate training and network formation for people doing the work
- › Raise awareness of leprosy-related issues through effective communication methods
- › Build partnerships with other stakeholders for more effective implementation of strategies

## About Leprosy



Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is an infectious disease that mainly affects the skin and peripheral nerves. Left untreated, it can lead to permanent disability. Today, leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT) available free of charge throughout the world. Fear of leprosy and social stigma remain deep-rooted, however, and much remains to be done to change the image of the disease and eliminate discrimination.



# Our work

Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative pursues the goal of zero leprosy, a world free from all forms of suffering associated with the disease, through a three-part mission: tackling disease, eliminating discrimination and preserving history.

## Tackling disease



Leprosy still occurs in more than 120 countries. Early detection and treatment remain essential to prevent permanent disability caused by the disease.

The Initiative works to secure political commitment for the fight against leprosy through the advocacy of the WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination. Meanwhile, we work with the WHO and other stakeholders to support action against the disease in high-priority countries.



Advocacy and awareness-raising: The WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination meets Pope Francis in 2023.



Financial support: The Initiative has donated over US\$200 million to the WHO's Global Leprosy Programme since 1975, including funding free distribution of multidrug therapy (MDT) from 1995 to 1999.



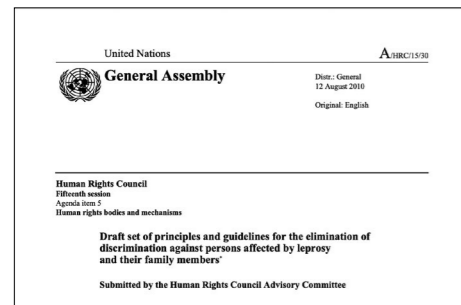
Conference organizing: The Initiative helped to organize national conferences on leprosy in Myanmar in 2018 and in Bangladesh in 2019.

## Eliminating discrimination



Although an effective cure for leprosy has been available since the 1980s, stigma and discrimination against persons affected by the disease persist, pushing them to the margins of society and limiting their opportunities in life.

In order to eliminate this discrimination, the Initiative's efforts include: carrying out awareness-raising activities; engaging in advocacy through the role of the WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination; working to empower persons affected by leprosy, strengthen their organizations and develop networks between them; and cooperating with the UN Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.



UN resolution on leprosy: The Initiative's advocacy helped pave the way for the adoption of a landmark 2010 UN General Assembly resolution on elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members, accompanied by principles and guidelines.



Global Appeal to End Stigma and Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy: Since 2006, the Initiative has organized an annual Global Appeal launched on or around World Leprosy Day with the support of high-profile individuals and organizations.



Empowering individuals and organizations: The Initiative has supported 37 organizations of persons affected by leprosy in 22 countries to empower them and promote their social and economic rehabilitation.



UN Special Rapporteur on leprosy: The Initiative advocated for a UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members, who was appointed in 2017 and whose mandate was extended for a further three years in 2020.



Vatican symposiums: The Initiative organized international symposiums at the Vatican on Hansen's disease in 2016 and 2023



Global Forum: The Initiative hosted the Global Forum of People's Organizations on Hansen's Disease in Manila (2019) and Hyderabad (2022).

## Preserving history



As leprosy and its associated problems become matters of the past, the world is losing evidence of the highs and lows of how humans responded to the disease. Encounters with the stories of individuals and the places where they lived provide opportunities for reflection and the formulation of ideas and hopes for the future.

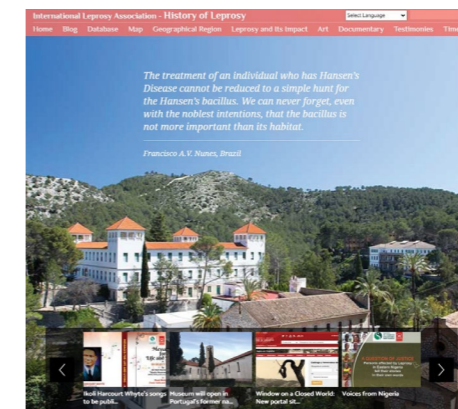
We support initiatives that serve as models for preserving the history of leprosy, as well as human resource development and networking for those involved in this work.



History preservation: The Initiative has promoted network-building and activities to preserve leprosy history and heritage in 14 countries.



Museum operation: Sasakawa Health Foundation has been entrusted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare with the operation of Japan's National Hansen's Disease Museum since 2020.



History website: The Initiative has operated the International Leprosy Association "History of Leprosy" website and database since 2016.



Workshops and symposiums: The Initiative organized five international workshops/symposiums in Japan on Hansen's Disease/Leprosy as Heritage of Humanity between 2012 and 2017.



"Don't Forget Leprosy" webinar series (August 2021- June 2022)



World Leprosy Day 2022 campaign (January-February 2022)



"Don't Forget Leprosy" survey (January - July 2022)



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



Event marking 150th anniversary of Dr. Armauer Hansen's discovery of the leprosy bacillus (February 2023, Bergen, Norway, and online)



# Don't Forget Leprosy

Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative launched the "Don't Forget Leprosy (Hansen's Disease)" campaign in 2021, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, to ensure that leprosy and the needs of those it affects were not overlooked. We have carried out a number of activities and events under the slogan "Don't Forget Leprosy" and the campaign continues as we work with stakeholders around the world for the goal of a leprosy-free world.

While the pandemic presented many challenges, it also created new opportunities. We launched a series of webinars that amplified the voices of persons affected by leprosy, medical professionals, health workers, human rights experts and other stakeholders. In the midst of COVID-19, we were able to share stories and experiences and stay in touch.

In the days and weeks leading up to and after World Leprosy Day 2022, we worked with 32 organizations from 13 countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia and Nigeria, on awareness-raising activities. We also supported research projects by 14 organizations from 10 countries on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on persons affected by leprosy, discrimination against them and the socio-economic situation of their communities.

In November 2022, we hosted the 2nd Global Forum of People's Organizations on Hansen's Disease, bringing together participants from around the world to discuss the challenges these organizations face and vision of the future they wish to create moving into the post-COVID era.

In January 2023, we launched Global Appeal 2023 to End Stigma and Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy as part of an international symposium on Hansen's disease that took place at the Vatican. This was followed in February by an event to mark the 150th anniversary of Dr. Armauer Hansen's discovery of *M. leprae*.

In June, we are co-hosting an international conference on Hansen's disease in Bergen, Norway, the city where Dr. Hansen made his discovery.

Leprosy remains an ongoing disease. It is important that leprosy is not forgotten and that we leave no one behind.



Global Appeal 2023 to End Stigma and Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy (January 2023, Vatican City)



Shantinagar colony, Telangana, India, 2022

## About us



**Yohei Sasakawa**  
WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination

World Health Organization (WHO) Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, Yohei Sasakawa, who is also Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy and Chairman of The Nippon Foundation, has visited around 100 countries in this role to learn about and raise awareness of the challenges associated with the disease since his appointment in 2001. He has gained a global perspective and is in a unique position to advocate for persons affected by leprosy and their families.



### Sasakawa Health Foundation

Sasakawa Health Foundation (SHF) was co-founded in 1974 by Yohei's father, Ryoichi Sasakawa, and Morizo Ishidate, a pharmacologist who was the first person to synthesize a drug treatment for leprosy in Japan. SHF is committed to a public health approach and collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders in order to address interrelated medical and social issues.



### The Nippon Foundation

The Nippon Foundation (TNF), also founded by Ryoichi Sasakawa, has been providing funding to leprosy-related initiatives since 1967. In addition to providing the majority of funding for SHF and the WHO Goodwill Ambassador's activities, TNF has been the main donor to the WHO's Global Leprosy Programme since 1975.



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**LEPROSY  
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