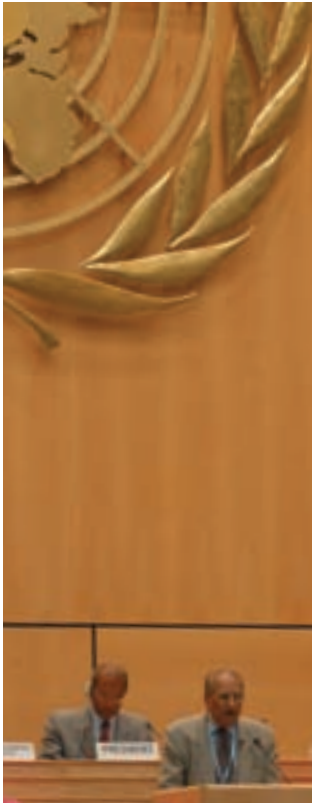


# ILU Wins Sasakawa Health Prize

Dr. Gokhale acknowledges Mahatma Gandhi as role model in fight against leprosy



The International Leprosy Union, represented by its president Dr. S.D. Gokhale, was one of two recipients of the 22nd Sasakawa Health Prize awarded at the World Health Assembly in Geneva on May 25.

The prize is presented annually to outstanding individuals and organizations working to improve primary health care in both the medical and social fields.

Launched in 1986, the ILU was a pioneer in the fight to protect the human rights of people affected by leprosy in India. For 20 years it has worked to correct public perceptions of the disease, empower those affected by it and help in their social reintegration.

In his speech of acceptance, Dr. Gokhale began by paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, saying, "Gandhi was a great visionary, and his mission was not only to treat but to eliminate and eradicate leprosy. He inspired hundreds of leprosy workers to take up this cause. ILU and myself are humble partners in this crusade."

Noting that "the battle against *M. Leprae* is more or less over," thanks to the introduction of multidrug therapy, Dr. Gokhale said that "the battle against stigma has still to be won." Even after being cured, people affected by leprosy continue to be "stigmatized, alienated and not accepted by their families and society," he said.

Based on his time as the superintendent of a leprosy home, where an elderly woman resident asked not to be introduced to a visiting official because the man was her son and believed his mother was dead, Dr. Gokhale came to see that suffering due to leprosy was not merely physical. "It is the existence of stigma that hurts leprosy patients the most," he said. ■

## Leprosy LEXICON

### ● *M. leprae*

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by a bacterium, *Mycobacterium leprae*. This slow-growing bacterium is related to *M. tuberculosis*, the organism that causes TB. *M. leprae* was discovered in 1873 by a Norwegian physician, Gerhard Henrick Armauer Hansen. Because of the negative associations attached to the word leprosy, the disease is known by many today as Hansen's disease.

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## FROM THE EDITORS

### LEPROSY AND HIV/AIDS

Two recent statements on HIV/AIDS could easily have been referring to leprosy.

At a civil society hearing at the end of May in connection with a UN General Assembly high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that the only way to win the fight against HIV/AIDS is if civil society is at the heart of those efforts.

"One of the absolute musts in this effort is greater and more meaningful involvement of people living with HIV.

"Their perspectives are needed to make sense of programs, planning and policy-making for HIV prevention, care and treatment. Their engagement is the key to stamping out stigma and discrimination. Their voice is the surest way to sustain the passion and compassion we need to win against the pandemic.

"Yet, so far, HIV-positive people have not been involved nearly enough. The international community has not made full use of their

expertise and insight. Too often, attempts to engage them have looked like tokenism," he said.

"We must do better. That means that governments, the UN system and civil society at large need to develop more effective partnerships with people living with HIV."

A few days earlier, on the opening day of the World Health Assembly in Geneva, delegates were introduced to an HIV/AIDS activist from Kenya, Johnson Mwakazi.

Mwakazi, who is HIV positive, spoke of his experiences through this poem:

### Underneath the Veil

This one thing has destroyed families,  
This one thing has destroyed marriages,  
This one thing has killed men.

It is not HIV

It is not AIDS

...It is stigmatization.

I say STIGMATIZATION.