



Yohei Sasakawa gives a speech during his visit to Culion. Beyond him is a monument marking the landing site of the first leprosy patients brought to the island on May 27, 1906.

PHILIPPINES (MAY 5-8)

In early May I was delighted to take part in a remarkable event: the centenary celebration of the founding of a leprosy colony on Culion island in the Philippines.

Culion lies about 200 kilometers southwest of Manila, and at one time was the world's largest leprosy colony.

The first batch of leprosy patients arrived on Culion on May 27, 1906, where they were met by an American doctor, four French sisters of St. Paul de Chartres and a Spanish Jesuit priest. This was the subject of a poignant reenactment that I attended on May 6. The "lepers" were all played by persons affected by leprosy living on Culion.

to the world on how to overcome deep-rooted stigma and discrimination.

Following the reenactment, I took part in the formal opening of the Culion Museum & Archives. Funded by the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, this is a beautifully curated project that takes visitors through Culion's history as a leprosy colony and provides an excellent introduction to the topic. In the words of Dr. Arturo Cunanan, head of the Culion Leprosy Control & Rehabilitation Program and himself born on Culion, "The museum is a repository of our heritage. We open it with pride."

Toward the end of the day, I attended a service of remembrance at Culion's cemetery for leprosy patients. Even in death, persons with leprosy were segregated.

Noting how far Culion has come since 1906, Rommel Howard Iway, the president of the St. Ignatius College Alumni Association, referred to those buried there as "sacrificial lambs." Describing Culion today as a "paradise," he added, "If they are looking at us from heaven, they might be saying, 'This is our gift to you from us.'"



Dr. Arturo Cunanan: a Culion native and main organizer of the centennial celebrations



Posing with sisters of the Order of St. Paul de Chartres.

This was followed by the unveiling of a marker at the landing site, and the release of 100 doves and balloons. Many speeches were made, and in my own remarks I heralded Culion's transformation from an island of despair to a place of hope.

From being an isolated leprosy colony 100 years ago, Culion achieved status as a municipality in 1995, and is now seeking to make its way like any other community. Many living on the island today are the children and grandchildren of leprosy patients and of the doctors and staff of the original sanatorium facilities.

I believe Culion sends a very positive message

SWITZERLAND (MAY 24-26)

Toward the end of May, I was in Geneva for the World Health Assembly, an event overshadowed by the sudden and untimely death of WHO Director-General Dr. J. W. Lee (see page 5).

I had the opportunity to meet with health ministers from India, Madagascar, Tanzania, Angola, Myanmar and Nepal, as well as health ministry representatives from Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique.

I also had the pleasure of attending the award ceremony for the 22nd Sasakawa Health Prize, which was presented to the International Leprosy Union and accepted by its president, Dr. S.D. Gokhale, for its services to leprosy work. Congratulations! ■