

# Sasakawa Receives Int'l Gandhi Award

Honor recognizes decades of service to fighting leprosy

WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa was recently presented with the 2006 International Gandhi Award at a ceremony in Wardha, India, spiritual home of India's "father of the nation" Mahatma Gandhi.

The award is made every three years by the Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation, which was established in 1951 to perpetuate the memory of Gandhi and his life-long interest in leprosy.

First issued in 1986, the award goes to an individual or institution that has made a significant contribution to improving the quality of life of leprosy-affected persons and helping them to lead normal lives in society.

Indian Vice-President Shri Bairon Singh Shekhawat, who chairs the award committee, presented the award at a ceremony on April 12.

In his speech of acceptance, Sasakawa said that "from eliminating leprosy as a public health problem, we are moving toward eradicating the disease altogether. But leprosy has another aspect; a social aspect. We still have a long way to go before the stigma and discrimination associated with the disease have been banished. Until then, people affected by leprosy will not truly be free of it."

The vice-president described Sasakawa as an "exceptional man of our times in the field of leprosy eradication." He continued: "Today, the biggest challenge we face is the integration of the leprosy-cured persons into society's mainstream. A large number of leprosy-affected people, after they are cured, remain poor and below the poverty line... they are denied their

fundamental right of life with dignity."

Sasakawa has spent the past three decades supporting efforts to eliminate leprosy from the world, and in 2001 was appointed WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination. In recent years, he has increasingly focused his attention on tackling the social aspects of the disease.

**"We still have a long way to go before stigma and discrimination are banished."**

On World Leprosy Day 2006, in New Delhi, he led 11 world leaders including former US President Jimmy Carter, the Dalai Lama and former President Venkataraman of India, in issuing a Global Appeal to end stigma and discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their families.

On 29 January this year, in Manila, he joined 16 representatives of people affected by leprosy from around the world in issuing a second Global Appeal, calling for the restoration of the dignity and recognition of the human rights of leprosy-affected persons. In the words of Global Appeal 2007: "Denying the inherent human rights of anyone on the basis of disease is indefensible. Discrimination can never be justified. Silence on this issue is not acceptable."

Sasakawa donated his cash prize of 200,000 Rupees to the newly formed Sasakawa-India Leprosy Foundation (see page 8). ■



## Past Winners of International Gandhi Award

- 1986: Dr. Dharmendra (India) and Dr. Turkan Saylan (Turkey)
- 1988: Dr. Ma Hai De (China) and Professor T. N. Jagadisan (India)
- 1990: Dr. R. V. Wardekar (India) and Dr. M. F. Lechat (Belgium)
- 1992: Dato E. J. Lawrence (Kuala Lumpur) and Late Cardinal P E Léger (Quebec)
- 1994: Dr. Joon Lew (South Korea) and Dr. V. Ekambaram (India)
- 1996: Ms. Jean Watson (United Kingdom) and Dr. S. K. Noordeen (India)
- 1998: Mrs. Mathilde Gruner (Germany) and Dr. S. D. Gokhale (India)
- 2000: ALERT (Ethiopia) and Dr. K. V. Desikan (India)
- 2003: Dr. H. Srinivasan (India)