

# From Mumbai to Maputo

The goodwill ambassador's travels take him to India, Madagascar and Mozambique.

## INDIA (APRIL 11-15)

In April, I made my second visit of the year to India, traveling to Wardha in Maharashtra State. This holds a special place in the hearts of Indians. About eight kilometers from the center of the town is the Sevagram Ashram, where Mahatma Gandhi lived from 1936 to 1948, the year of his assassination. Here he meditated, cared for persons affected by leprosy, and oversaw India's independence movement.

The reason for my journey was to accept the 2006 International Gandhi Award from the Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation at a ceremony held on April 12. After receiving this great honor from India's vice president, I called at the ashram, now a place of historic interest. I spent a few moments in the shade of a tree, reflecting on all that has been achieved since Gandhi's day, but also on how pervasive stigma and discrimination remain.

On April 13, I traveled to Warora. This is the home of one of India's most celebrated social activists, Baba Amte. In 1949, he established a community for people affected by leprosy that he called Anandwan, or Garden of Joy.

After a memorable meeting with Baba Amte, who is now confined to bed, his son, Dr. Vikas Amte, took me on a tour. The land covers some 450 acres and is home to some 5,000 people affected by leprosy and persons with disabilities from all over India. They don't receive handouts but are employed in a variety of occupations — including agriculture, sewing, printing, carpet-making, and brick-making — to enable them to become self-sufficient. There is a bank, post office, shops, hospital and university and a famous band. It's just like a small town.

According to Vikas, "our mission is to close down Anandwan" — to change society so that places like Anandwan are no longer needed. Truly impressed by what I saw, I feel Anandwan has much to teach.



At work in Anandwan

On April 14, I flew to Mumbai, where I visited the Sanjay Nagar



Visiting Sanjay Nagar leprosy colony north of Mumbai

leprosy colony in Borivali, north of the city. This colony is led by Mr. Bhimrao Madhale, who is also the leader of Maharashtra's 37 self-settled colonies. It is located alongside a creek and is home to 5,000 persons affected by leprosy and their family members. In 2005, 30 homes were destroyed by flooding and hundreds more were damaged. But in a demonstration of unity and mutual assistance involving neighboring communities, area residents have done a wonderful job of rebuilding.

Next I visited the Acworth Leprosy Hospital. Founded in 1890, the hospital two years ago established a small museum in what used to be Ward No. 1. The museum recently copied all the historical documents related to leprosy for the past 100 years in the Maharashtra state archives. This will benefit students and researchers and the museum has already started to collaborate with the University of Mumbai's history department.

## MADAGASCAR (MAY 2-4)

On my last visit to Madagascar in 2005, I promised that I would return to congratulate the country when it eliminated leprosy as a public health problem. It was thus with great pleasure that I flew to Madagascar in May. Although only a short visit, it was very productive. I met with the president, health minister, foreign minister and the speaker of the Senate, and also had the honor of addressing the chamber.

In my address, I asked parliamentarians to publicize my three messages: leprosy is curable;