

I proudly carry this news because Mr Yohei Sasakawa is very special to me.

Since 2009, the year Dr Norman Borlaug died, I have been a Board member of the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA). From 2010, with great humility I accepted to replace Dr Borlaug in his role as President of SAA Board, but on one condition that I be referred to as Chair as I could not see myself in Borlaug's shoes. Co-founded in 1986 by Ryoichi Sasakawa (Yohei's father), former President of the USA Jimmy Carter, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Norman Borlaug following the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 which killed a million people, SAA has received Sasakawa support yearly since inception. Ryoichi Sasakawa at the start of the journey to support Africa's smallholder agriculture said: "teach a man to fish" and when he died in 1995, he passed on that mantle to his son Yohei who has supported the cause diligently every year without fail. Sasakawa Africa Association has been on the African continent, supporting smallholder farmers in their millions, and really expecting nothing in return. Yohei is a fighter for human rights and the fight against leprosy stigma has been close to him for over 60 years; that too he learnt from his father Ryoichi. I feel humbled to be associated to these causes.

CONGRATULATIONS YOHEI for receiving this year's Gandhi Peace Prize, which you truly deserve.

Ruth Oniang'o

Board Chair, Sasakawa Africa Association

Japan's Sasakawa Yōhei Wins International Gandhi Peace Prize for Hansen's Disease Work

Source: Nippon.com
Society Jan 25, 2019



On January 16, the government of India announced that the International Gandhi Peace Prize for 2018 would go to Nippon Foundation Chairman Sasakawa Yōhei, for his efforts toward eradicating Hansen's disease (leprosy) in India and elsewhere around the world.



Nippon Foundation Chairman Sasakawa Yōhei.

Sasakawa, now 80, has worked for more than half of his life to combat Hansen's disease and the social stigma associated with it. Serving in recent years as the World Health Organization's Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, he has focused in particular on India, which has the world's largest population of sufferers of the disease, making repeated visits to the colonies where they were historically segregated and promoting measures to restore their economic autonomy and combat prejudice against them in society.

Asked for comment, Sasakawa remarked: "It was a tremendous honor to receive word of this recognition in this, the 150th year since the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, who strove during his life to secure proper treatment for Hansen's disease sufferers. I view this prize as one conferred on all those who are still working to support those with

the disease. With this prize the Indian government is recognizing all that has been done to restore social standing to those who have the disease or have recovered from it, and I am proud to accept it on all of their behalf." Sasakawa went on to extend his thanks to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and others in the Indian government, along with the many individuals who have taken part in actions related to Hansen's disease over the years.

The International Gandhi Peace Prize was established in 1995 to mark the 125th birthday of the Indian human rights leader. It has previously been awarded to individuals like former President Nelson Mandela (in 2000) and Bishop Desmond Tutu (2005), both from South Africa, and to institutions like the Bangladeshi Grameen Bank founded by Muhammad Yunus (2000). Many recipients have also received Nobel Prize honors. Sasakawa is the first Japanese to receive the Indian award.

The prize is accompanied by a cash award of 10 million Indian rupees (about ¥15 million). The date and time of the formal award ceremony have yet to be announced.

(Originally published in Japanese. Banner photo: Sasakawa speaks with former Hansen's disease patients at an Indian facility in 2009. Courtesy the Nippon Foundation.)

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Leprosy is one of the oldest recorded diseases. Caused by the bacillus *Mycobacterium leprae*, it has affected multitudes over thousands of years — and, as a chronic disease with physical manifestations, has been a source of stigma and ostracism. Philanthropist Yohei Sasakawa, a passionate advocate for people with leprosy, calls it "the oldest continuing human rights issue in the history of mankind".

Sasakawa's book *No Matter Where the Journey Takes Me* is a moving account of efforts over almost 60 years to fight both disease and discrimination. Despite significant work, an

estimated 3 million people around the world are living with disability from leprosy. The book is a rallying cry for a world free of this disease.

Sasakawa begins by recounting how, in his twenties, he saw his father extend his hand to a man infected with leprosy. That set the seed for his personal commitment to vanquishing the disease, which led him to found the Sasakawa India Leprosy Foundation in New Delhi. He is also both the World Health Organization (WHO) Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, and Japan's Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy.

Source: nippon.com

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“I do not receive it alone. I receive it together with all who have worked with me over the years. This award will certainly give us renewed encouragement from Mahatma Gandhi.”
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