To Create a World
Full of Hope, Understanding and Peace

"My dear friends, with our heads held high, let us eliminate the stigma associated with leprosy. Through our efforts to eliminate prejudice, to win recognition from society, to request the rights of education, work and livelihood, which are inherent in every human being, we will work to create a world full of hope, understanding and peace."

– Liang Zhao Lun, Handa/IDEA China
Illuminating Ourselves

"Leprosy fell upon me like a divine scourge.

"As my afflictions mounted one after the other, I sobbed, I cried out, I moaned in agony, even as I groped through the dark days of my illness, searching for a ray of light to guide me. But like those luminescent fish dwelling in the sunless depths of the sea, I would not have light until I illuminated myself from within . . . .

"I was over 30 when I learned to write tanka and, as I reflected anew upon myself, other people and the world, I felt in my heart the beauty and the grandeur of existence. In poem after poem, I released years of bitter hardship, sometimes weeping, sometimes dancing for joy as I celebrated that spark of soul incarnate in my body. I gained such insight into the human condition that I became familiar with a love that exists apart from the bonds of flesh.

"Only after I lost my sight did a vision of blue mountains and white clouds flare up within me.

"Leprosy inspired a divine revelation."

– Akashi Kaijin, poet, Japan, 1901 - 1939
Tomoyoshi Sakazaki (left) and Hu Shou Ming, join their voices as part of the China-Japan Friendship Tour.

Throughout history and into the present, individuals affected by leprosy have been marginalized by society, denied their identities and their most basic human rights. Whole families have been stigmatized because of society's attitudes toward the disease, that have generally been based on folklore, cultural traditions and outdated images rather than fact.

Yet, throughout history there have also been many powerful examples of individuals who have refused to be labeled by society. Men and women have raised their voices, sometimes in necessary protest, but more often in poetry, music and art, to defy society's stereotypes, labels and limitations.

Little boat sailing on the river,
Green mountains pass by,
Mountains surrounded by fog and clouds
Our hearts nourished by the rain.
The boat filled with happy laughter and happy songs.
Fellow friends hand in hand like brothers and sisters.

– "Sightseeing on the Li River" by Hu Shou Ming

Ode to the Ox
The Ox is strong and powerful like Hercules
He never bullies those who are weaker and is always gentle.
He is honest and straightforward.
Grass is all he needs and he never desires more.
He doesn't seek a high position, but commits himself to farming.
He is never afraid of difficulty, just goes straight ahead with bravery.

Dying Wood Meets Spring
The ill tree is dying,
Attacked by wind and rain
Yet lucky to meet spring and be nourished
The dying tree is dreaming of a new life.

Paintings and poetry by Chen Shi Yun, Handa/IDEA China

A Legacy of Creativity and Inspiration
With Our Heads Held High

Antonio Borges, Jr., author, poet, and human rights advocate, speaking at the Opening Ceremony of the 16th International Leprosy Congress, Salvador, Brazil, 2003. IDEA Photo

"We will no longer bow our heads. We’ll hold them high. By our strength of purpose we will no longer feel ashamed or guilty. We will no longer have the fear of rejection. Most important, we will not be denied our human rights. We will maintain our esteem and dignity." -- Francisco A. V. Nunes, Brazil

"Coming to China, I began to think 'let us hold our heads high, and let us lead a positive life.'"
-- Yoshimi Komaki, China-Japan Friendship Tour

"We are no longer patients. We have recovered from the disease. The meeting on the Fifth International Day of Dignity and Respect encouraged us to ‘free ourselves of prejudice, and take a soar into the wind.’"
-- Isao Fukunaka, China-Japan Friendship Tour

Yuan Ya Hua, expert shoe and prosthesis maker, Handa/IDEA China. "Because of Handa, I now use my real name."

Emanuel Faria, USA, Editor of The STAR

Ms. Leela (left) and her friend work in a garment factory in India, while living in a leprosy village.

Birke Nigatu, Chairperson, Ethiopian National Association of Persons Affected by Leprosy, with her family. Photos by Pamela Parlapiano
IDEA Global Campaign to Eliminate the Stigma: March 11, 2003

In 1999, IDEA (International Association for Integration, Dignity and Economic Advancement) designated March 11 as the International Day of Dignity and Respect to be celebrated annually as a means to focus on the dignity inherent in every human being. On this, the Fifth International Day of Dignity and Respect, WE, IDEA members throughout the world are launching a global campaign to eliminate the stigma associated with leprosy.

The campaign, initiated by those of us who are working to eliminate the stigma in our own lives, will replace old images and stereotypes with modern realities. We will focus on the achievements of our colleagues throughout the world who have turned a diagnosis of leprosy into a personal challenge and ultimately a personal victory. At the same time, we will work with our partners to restore opportunities for education and employment that continue to be denied men, women and children, simply because we have been diagnosed with what is now a curable disease.

IDEA has set the goal of having issues faced by people affected by leprosy placed on the United Nations Human Rights Agenda, since the stigma associated with this disease has been responsible for widespread human rights violations throughout history in all parts of the world.

We believe that the major challenge facing the world with regard to leprosy is to eliminate the unwarranted stigma that continues to deny individuals their right to lead productive lives with dignity in their homes and communities throughout the world. IDEA will work with partners, locally, nationally and internationally, from a variety of different disciplines, to eliminate one of the oldest and most persistent forms of social injustice, prejudice and discrimination that society has forced upon its fellow human beings.

Together, we firmly resolve to do everything in our power to enable our colleagues throughout the world to join us with heads held high as we work together to end social injustice and regain our rightful places as contributing members of society.

We further resolve to transform our deep personal losses into a universal message of hope, understanding, friendship and peace, as we work together to help make the world a better place for all of humanity.

[This declaration was again made at the First Women's Empowerment Workshop in India and the First National Empowerment Workshop in Nigeria, also held in 2003]
Mr. Hu Shou Ming, Handa Award Winner, 2003

Today, I am honored to attend the ceremony of the Fifth International Day of Dignity and Respect. This activity strongly encourages me to overcome my sense of inferiority which I have had since I was diagnosed with leprosy 30 years ago. This activity not only gives me the encouragement to get rid of my sense of inferiority but also the resolve to assist my fellows who have faced the challenges of leprosy.

I am from the leprosy village in Anqui City, Shandong Province. I am responsible for management and medical treatment of the village. Speaking of being self-supporting, we began to manage our own lives when the government of Shandong Province announced that leprosy had been "eliminated" in Shandong Province. After that, there was no "patient" in the village. Of those cured of the disease, some have gone back to their homes. Those who remained are people who are homeless, old, weak, or have disabilities. In the meantime, the Dermatology Institute, including all the doctors and nurses, left the village and took the medicine and medical facilities along with them.

In other words, the leprosy village fell into a very difficult situation - we became a forgotten corner where no one cares about us.

Fortunately, people recovered from this darkness after a period of confusion and hesitation. We got together to walk on our own way. We developed our own strength, self-respect and self-confidence and became self-supporting.

We work together like a big family. Thirty-five percent of the income we get from production goes to the village, while 65% goes to individuals. After several years' effort, our living standard has been improved. However, the heavy burden of physical work added great pressure to the villagers who already had disabilities. Fortunately, that has been changed since we bought some agricultural facilities. In the meantime, our productivity rate has been increased. It is not enough to depend on farming. In recent years, we have set up centers for raising pigs and sheep. To our delight, our economy has been greatly improved after working hard for over ten years.

There are 18 villagers who have the ability to do physical work. They voluntarily take good care of the 23 people who have serious disabilities. This is the recipe why everyone enjoys this big family. To enrich the villagers' spiritual lives, we set up a club where we have television, stereos, chess, etc. People living around the village, who have not had leprosy, often come to play and sing songs with the villagers. As a result, they have built a good relationship with each other.

Nevertheless, we can't ignore that there are still about 150 people who are seriously disabled living in severe conditions in Anqui City. I have a dream that the government will get all the people who are elderly and disabled together and support their living expenses, which will enable them to live out the rest of their lives happily.

[Note: Mr. Hu Shou Ming received the Handa Award in 2003 for his significant contributions to his community. In 1998, he was chosen by Congress Organizers to Speak at the Opening Ceremony of the XV International Leprosy Congress which was held in Beijing, China. This was the first time in the 100-year history of the Congress that any individual affected by leprosy was invited to share their experiences during the Opening Ceremony.]
A Beacon to Light the Way

William and Margaret Kikuchi, guest interpreters at IDEA Center for the Voices of Humanity.

"The older generation is like a beacon. They point to possibilities of encounter, solidarity, of helping each other."

-- Zilda Borges, IDEA, Brazil

Cathrine Puahala, resident of Kalaupapa, Hawaii since 1942, shares her wisdom and experiences. Photo by Wayne Levin

"It is more important for me to understand other people than for them to understand me. Because by understanding them, I can learn to understand myself."

-- Tokio Nishimura, during the China-Japan Friendship Tour, in which individuals, many of whom have been isolated from society for most of their lives, came together to celebrate dignity, respect and friendship. For some of the participants from Japan, it was the first time that they used passports with their real names. For some from China, the Tour provided the opportunity to leave isolated villages and travel on an airplane for the first time.

"Even though we cannot understand each other's languages, we can communicate with our hearts . . . ."

-- Kazuo Yamane, reflecting on the China-Japan Friendship Tour

"I felt true humanity and friendship . . . ."

-- Yang Xiao Yuan, who called a meeting with his entire village the day after he returned home to tell about the International Day of Dignity and Respect and the work of Handa/IDEA China, which moved many of the villagers to tears.

Ou Jing Zhao (left) greets Suiko and Ryohei Shibata during the China-Japan Friendship Tour.

Zhou Jin Ye and Mieko Nishino bid farewell to each other at the end of the China-Japan Friendship Tour.

Matsuo Sasaki and Guo Zhao Huan on the last day of the China-Japan Friendship Tour. Photos by Pamela Parlapiano
IDEA Global Campaign to Eliminate the Stigma Associated with Leprosy

"Unless stigma and discrimination vanish, the planet will never attain true peace."

-- Isao Fukunaka, China-Japan Friendship Tour

It has long been said that the stigma associated with leprosy will never be eliminated. IDEA is actively challenging this view. This newsletter illustrates how the stigma is being challenged and losing its power to destroy lives. The stigma associated with leprosy is being replaced with images of Honor, Dignity, Self-confidence, Respect and Creativity. Social Injustice and Discrimination are being replaced with a demand for the restoration of Human Rights. Anyone who has attended an IDEA event has seen this process in action.

IDEA has identified seven key strategies for eliminating the stigma:

1. Acknowledge that the Stigma Can be Eliminated;

2. Transform the Social Image of Leprosy by Promoting a Positive Image and Emphasizing The Legacy of Creativity and Inspiration;

3. Continue to Expand IDEA's International Network of Support;

4. Promote Opportunities for Education and Economic Independence;

5. Build Bridges Toward Universal Human Rights and Peace through the IDEA Center for the Voices of Humanity;

6. Respect and Promote the Dignity of the Older Generation of Individuals Affected by Leprosy by Using Their Life Experiences to Effect Social Change;

7. Restore Family Ties.

Next newsletter: "Still Dear to My Heart - The Restoration of Family Ties"

A Global Campaign to Eliminate the Stigma Associated with Leprosy is long overdue. We invite you to become a partner with IDEA in this effort.

New ideas and bold actions require funding and other forms of support in order to ensure that vision becomes reality. Please make your tax-deductible contribution payable to IDEA and mail it to:

IDEA, c/o William Kikuchi, IDEA Membership Coordinator, 1821 Manor Heights Drive, Marrero, LA 70072 USA

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