

Press Release

Armauer Hansen International Film Festival to be Held: The world's first leprosy themed film festival

TOKYO, Oct. 16, 2023 --To commemorate the 150th anniversary of Armauer Hansen's discovery of the leprosy bacillus, Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative and Bergen International Film Festival are co-hosting a special Hansen's disease programme within the festival, in collaboration with the University of Bergen and the Leprosy Museum.



Armauer Hansen International Film Festival: The world's first leprosy themed film festival

Armauer Hansen International Film Festival (AHIFF), the world's first leprosy film festival, consists of four feature films and two short films that depict the situation for people with leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, from both a historical and contemporary perspective. The festival includes a screening at the Leprosy Museum, regular screenings, and a dedicated school programme.

"Bergen International Film Festival facilitates the world's first film festival for the disease of leprosy, which is still prevalent in many countries. We look forward to marking the conclusion of the anniversary of the Bergen native Armauer Hansen's discovery of the leprosy bacillus 150 years ago," says festival director Tor Fosse.

Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, has shared his thoughts, saying, *"I believe that there is much to be learned from the past experiences of people confronting leprosy, and I hope that people can feel this through the film festival. As well as being a disease, leprosy is also a pressing human rights issue that still affects millions of people around the world. I hope that those who watch the films will understand the deep-rooted stigma and discrimination that has isolated people affected by the disease and will play their part to create a world where no one is left behind."*

Despite the leprosy bacillus having been discovered in Bergen, it is safe to say that most Norwegians and the general public know little about the current state of leprosy and the stigma surrounding the disease. Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative and the Bergen International Film Festival will arrange a festival programme with a dedicated focus on bridging a knowledge gap surrounding the disease from a historical and current perspective. The festival consists of documentaries and fiction films with content related to the theme, as well as special school screenings.

On October 23rd, we will give the audience a glimpse of modern leprosy colonies in China and Brazil when we are showing the short films [CHILDREN OF LEPROSY](#) and [THE VILLAGE](#) at the Leprosy Museum, before taking a look back at Bergen's local and groundbreaking leprosy history with a tour of the museum.

On October 24th the festival officially opens, with a reception at Kulturhuset followed by a screening of the documentary [THE LAST MILE](#). The film documents international efforts of WHO Goodwill Ambassador Yohei Sasakawa to eradicate leprosy and remove the stigma and discrimination associated with the disease. Sasakawa will present at both the reception and the screening of THE LAST MILE.

We are also showing the internationally acclaimed films [THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES](#), [YOMEDDINE](#), and [SWEET BEAN](#), all of which tackle stigma related to Hansen's disease. You can find more information about the festival [here](#).

About Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative:

The Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative is a strategic alliance established in 2020 between WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, Yohei Sasakawa, The Nippon Foundation, and Sasakawa Health Foundation. Together they share a vision of zero leprosy and work towards a world without any suffering related to the disease.

About BIFF:

The Bergen International Film Festival annually presents over 150 documentary and fiction films, making it the largest film festival in Norway. BIFF has a dedicated focus on documentaries, but as an audience member, you also have the chance to catch a range of fiction films, short films, and more. This year it is also hosting AHIFF as part of the festival.

Contact

Sasakawa Health Foundation

Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative

Communication officer: Chiemi Sanga

Email: shf_hd_pr@shf.or.jp

Phone: 81-70-4509-4213

Website: <https://sasakawaleprosyinitiative.org/>