

Press Release

Sasakawa Leprosy Initiative Collaborates with Miss Supranational 2024 for Leprosy Awareness Campaign in South Sulawesi, Indonesia

TOKYO, Aug. 29, 2024 / -- Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative (SLI) recently conducted a series of leprosy awareness activities in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, in partnership with Miss Supranational 2024 crown holder, Miss Harashta Haifa Zahra. The activities were carried out in collaboration with PerMaTa Indonesia, an organization of persons affected by leprosy, and its support organization Yayasan Dedikasi Tjipta Indonesia (YDTI).

SLI is dedicated to realizing a world free of leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, and works with a wide range of stakeholders, including the WHO, governments of leprosy-endemic countries, international NGOs, and organizations of persons affected by leprosy. In 2021, it launched a "Don't Forget Leprosy" campaign to ensure that leprosy was not overlooked in the midst of COVID-19, and which now encourages national leprosy programs to rebuild in the wake of the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Miss Supranational, an annual international beauty competition launched in Poland in 2009, is distinguished by its "From the Ground Up Community Service Initiative", which emphasizes social contribution over physical beauty. All contestants are encouraged to use the most valuable resource they have—time—to make an impact in their communities.

Since 2023, Miss Supranational winners have actively collaborated with SLI to raise awareness about leprosy, using their global reach to support this important cause. Dr. Takahiro Nanri, President of SLI, expressed his appreciation, saying, "Raising awareness of leprosy is essential, and we are grateful to be able to reach a wider audience through our partnership with Miss Supranational."

Miss Harashta Haifa Zahra, the first Indonesian to win the Miss Supranational crown, was born in West Java in 2003. She is currently pursuing a degree in environmental engineering at the National Institute of Technology Bandung (ITENAS).

Indonesia has the third highest number of leprosy cases in the world, and discrimination against persons affected by leprosy remains a significant issue. PerMaTa's South Sulawesi branch, the most active within the organization, works closely with YDTI to combat stigma and provide much needed-support to those affected.

"Stigma and discrimination against persons affected by leprosy has decreased significantly

compared to a decade ago, but we are far from eliminating it," said Al Kadri, Chairman of PerMaTa, whose members conduct home visits to offer emotional and physical support to people under treatment.

On August 26, Miss Supranational visited Jongaya Leprosy Settlement in the provincial capital Makassar. There she met with the head of Makassar health department, provincial and municipal officials, settlement residents, PerMaTa members and other stakeholders at the local community hall.

She shared her experience of being inspired by Princess Diana's compassion for leprosy patients and expressed her commitment to becoming a driving force in changing perceptions of leprosy. She also pledged to help ensure that no one suffering from the disease is left untreated, helping to prevent disability due to leprosy, and working toward the elimination of the stigma associated with the disease.



Residents of Jongaya Leprosy Settlement and PerMaTa members gave Miss Haifa an enthusiastic welcome.

The following day, August 27, Miss Supranational visited Maros District, where she discussed strategies for managing leprosy cases and improving service quality with the local health department. She also attended an event at a local school where she and PerMaTa members encouraged students to learn about leprosy as a step toward reducing stigma in the community.

Miss Harashta's involvement in raising awareness of leprosy in her home country is a welcome development for campaigners in Indonesia and SLI looks forward to working with her in other countries as well during her tenure as Miss Supranational 2024.

About Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative

The Initiative is a strategic alliance between WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination Yohei Sasakawa, The Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Health Foundation for achieving a world without leprosy and its associated challenges. Since 1975, The Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Health Foundation have supported the national leprosy programs of endemic countries through the WHO, with support totaling some US\$200 million to date. The foundations have also played an important role in advocating with the United Nations, helping to secure a 2010 UN General Assembly resolution on elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members and the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on leprosy by the UN Human Rights Council in 2017. Recognizing persons affected by leprosy as key actors in solving leprosy-related issues, the foundations have supported 37 organizations of persons affected by leprosy in 22 countries since the 1990s.

About Leprosy

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is an infectious disease that mainly affects the skin and peripheral nerves. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted case-finding activities, over 200,000 new cases were being reported annually. While leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy, left untreated can result in permanent disability. Many myths and misconceptions still surround the disease. In various parts of the world, patients, those who have been treated and cured, and even their family members continue to be stigmatized, limiting their opportunities for education, employment and full participation in society. The Sasakawa Leprosy Initiative is working tirelessly to revive and strengthen national leprosy programs to achieve a leprosy-free world.

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