Shri M Hamid Ansari, the Vice-President of India, was in Sewagram in Wardha district on 1st July 2010 to present the 2009 International Gandhi Award to Vidarbha Maharogi Sewa Mandal, a non-governmental organisation for leprosy patients, and Dr Vijaykumar Pannikar, former Team Leader of the Global Leprosy Programme.

Referring to Mahatma Gandhi’s special concern for those affected by leprosy, he called upon everyone to adopt a similarly positive approach and to accept them in society. He said: ‘While the government and civil society have taken up this task, I believe there is great merit in going back to the Gandhian focus on the individual citizen. Each one of us in our own sphere must show greater awareness about leprosy and proactively take steps to end the social discrimination and bring about the social integration of the leprosy affected persons’.

These awards have been presented since 1986 as a way to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi’s service to those affected by leprosy and his scientific approach to leprosy. Those who receive this award are recognised as having made an outstanding contribution to leprosy work and improving the lives of people affected by leprosy. Previous recipients include Cardinal P E Léger, Dr V Ekambaram, the All Africa Leprosy and Tuberculosis Rehabilitation Training Centre in Ethiopia and Professor Michel Lechat.
