PADMA SHRI AWARD

Dr. P.K. GOPAL, M.A. Ph.D

Dr. P.K. Gopal is the President of IDEA India, an organization working towards improving the quality of life for people affected by leprosy. His relentless service in the leprosy field for the past 40 years has made him a well-known figure around the world, especially for his contribution in Socio Economic Empowerment of people affected by leprosy.

He was born in Erode, Tamil Nadu in a weaver’s family on 13th May 1941. After his graduation in Economics in Erode he joined Loyola College in Chennai in 1970 for Post-Graduation study in Medical Social Work. He was then employed by the Sacred Heart Hospital, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu where he started a Rehabilitation Department – the first of its kind in the State. He worked for 25 years in that hospital, during which time he provided rehabilitation service to around 3000 leprosy affected and physically challenged people. He also conducted many research studies in rehabilitation and submitted Papers to National and International Leprosy Congresses. In 1994 he obtained a Doctorate Degree from Ranchi University in Social Science.

Through his efforts an international organization, IDEA (Integration, Dignity & Economic Advancement of people affected by leprosy) was established in 1994 following the leprosy conference in Brazil. In 1996 he was elected a Member of the Medico-Social Commission of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP), London for 5 years. During this period he was responsible for publication of the book Guidelines for Socio-Economic Rehabilitation which has since being used by organizations around the
world. In early 1997 he started IDEA India to provide services for leprosy-affected people in India. Socio-Economic Rehabilitation (over 600 people have received assistance), Education of Children of leprosy-affected parents / children affected by leprosy (about 9000), fighting against the stigma of leprosy / related Human Rights violations and Socio-Economic Empowerment of people affected by leprosy have been the main objectives of his organization, and he works with WHO on issues related to leprosy. He is a Member of Government of India Technical Resource Group formed by the Director General of Health Services, New Delhi. He is a Board Member of International Leprosy Association, USA.

Working jointly with Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation, Japan and other stake holders from 2003, Dr. Gopal was a signatory to the United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva’s unanimous resolution to end stigma and discrimination in leprosy. The resolution was later adopted by UN General Assembly on 21st March 2011.

In 2006-2007 his IDEA India & National Forum conducted a nationwide survey to identify leprosy colonies and homes in India, and brought to light 850 of these.

He received a National Award from the President of India in 1986 as an outstanding Rehabilitation Officer. In 1995 he was awarded the Erwin Stindl Memorial Oration Award, Calcutta. In 1984 he received Best Social Worker Award, from Loyola College Madras. In 2001 he received the Wellesley Bailey Award in London, the AIFO Award in Italy, and later in 2005 the FESCO Award in Japan for his outstanding contribution to the field of rehabilitation in improving the quality of lives of people affected by leprosy around the world especially in India. In 2012 the Life Time Achievement Award was given by the Karnataka State Sumanahalli Organisation.