
Leprosy – Tuberculosis Relief Association Dinslaken

News on activities Parish St. Vincentius, Dinslaken (Germany)

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Annual Report 2018

Activities in Dinslaken and abroad

Theme:

***Whatever you did for one of the least
of these brothers of mine you did for me***

(Matthew 25:40)

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I. Abroad

May 2018 Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is territorially connected with Karakalpakstan. Leprosy occurs more seldom than in Karakalpakstan. Therefore, the training of physicians and medical students at the University Urgench as well as in smaller medical facilities was my main task.

May 2018 Karakalpakstan

The Autonomous Republic in Uzbekistan has a population of 2 mill inhabitants. Dr Atajan Khamrajev, Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors, has been our contact person for 14 years.

Compared to the other 15 countries of the former USSR, Karakalpakstan has the highest rate of infection of Leprosy. Therefore, my most important tasks were: check-up examinations of cured patients and their contact persons and lectures about the current state of Leprosy for physicians and medical students.

To fulfil these tasks, I organised an epidemiological expedition to four endemic areas (occurrence of leprosy from generation to generation). I invited the Russian leprologist Dr Viatceslav Tsemba, who works in Moscow and is regarded as one of the best leprologists in Russia, to participate. Supported by local physicians we travelled from one place to another for hundreds of kilometres in the above-mentioned areas. It was our aim to detect new cases and thus to interrupt the chain of infection. I was devastated to examine patients who did not have any underwear. The physician in charge explained, 'You cannot hide poverty!' So we distributed underwear and clothes. 10 new cases of Leprosy were detected during our examinations.

May 2018 Belarus

On this trip, I was accompanied by Mrs Monika Barking on behalf of the Caritas Association Dinslaken.

When we arrived at the airport of Minsk, Pater Vitalij Dobralowicz, Director of the Caritas Association Belarus, was already waiting for us and took us to Grodno by car (4 hours-drive).

We thoroughly checked further functioning of the large district hospital, which is in charge of 300,000 inhabitants and has received various medical equipment from the town of Dinslaken over the last years.

Our next stop was Ross, a town located 60 km from Grodno. It was a great pleasure to see an almost completed object, the 'Social Rehabilitation', also named 'House of Mercy'. We had arranged for a large 20-ton transporter from Dinslaken to Grodno containing interior equipment.

Our last stop was the Tuberculosis Hospital in Grodno - being the largest project supported by the town of Dinslaken at the moment.

Monika Barking and myself were devastated when we realized that this clinic was in a disastrous state! Since it would not be possible to restore the building, only demolition and reconstruction would make sense. Construction works of a new building had been started five years earlier but had to be stopped due to insufficient financial means. Dr. Halina Gieda has been our contact person at the TB Clinic for many years. She organised for a tour of all the rooms – we were not able to conceal the horror we felt! During a tea break following our tour one leading physician made the remark, 'You understand the difficulties we have to face every day!'

We promised to stay in close contact and help as much as possible. This journey to Belarus made it clear how important and valuable the Leprosy and Tuberculosis Project Dinslaken was aboard.

October 2018 Astrakhan, Russia

The Double Jubilee Conference 2018

Nine countries took part in this conference. 70 years ago, the Russian Scientific Research Institute was founded in Astrakhan. Initially the Institute was in charge of all member countries of the USSR, but since the dissolution of the Soviet Union it has been responsible for Russia only. This period also covers the beginning of activities carried out in this territory by the Town of Dinslaken, so that Russia and Dinslaken, Germany, are closely connected. There have been long-standing ties of friendship with Russia with regard to Leprosy work for 25 years.

This Conference offered the possibility to present the evolution of the Russian-German Leprosy Care for patients as well as the current status of scientific research. Eventually, a vaccine has been found to protect contact persons against this disease. News regarding the transmission as well as a new method of fighting leprophobia (the fear of leprosy) were discussed.

For the first time it was possible to gather leprosy patients and medical staff at a round table during a conference. Our message was 'We all are brothers and sisters and respect and care for each other whether we are healthy or ill. '

Pastor Barthel-Kalscheu (Parish St. Vincentius) was also a member of our 4-person delegation from Germany.

November 2018 Belarus

Once again, the necessity to visit Belarus became inevitable. Two speech therapists from Karakalpakstan have taken up a training programme in the district hospital of Grodno to focus on deaf-mute children and thus be able to continue ENT (ears-nose-throat) - treatments within their country. Karakalpakstan is the third country where a relief project for deaf-mute children has been implemented by the town of Dinslaken. At the same time, we visited the Caritas Centre – the Tuberculosis Hospital and the House for Social Rehabilitation – and supplied them with necessary relief items as far as possible.

Since we have been in contact with Archbishop Aleksander Kaszkiewicz for many years, I visited him in Grodno and we arranged for further exchange visits. Therefore, Archbishop Kaszkiewicz will presumably participate in the 40th Leprosy March in Dinslaken.

II. Dinslaken

March

Transport of relief goods for Caritas to the Sanctuary Heart of Jesus in Stettin, Poland, containing incontinence and dressing materials donated by the company Paul Hartman AG, South Germany. We have repeatedly arranged for such deliveries for elderly and ill patients that are cared for by Caritas.

March

The Director of Caritas Grodno, Belarus, Priest Dr. Roman Raczko, was received at Caritas Dinslaken by Mr Meerbeck, the local Director. A passenger car was donated to Caritas Grodno so that patients and elderly people can be looked after in rural areas around Grodno. See also newspaper article NRZ and RP published on June 25, 2018.

April

Meeting of women being active members of the catholic and protestant parishes of Dinslaken. Projects were being discussed and new ideas were included in the projects to help people locally as well as far away that are in need of help.

June

Dr. Roman Raczko, Director of Caritas Grodno, paid another visit to Dinslaken. He supervised a transport of relief goods (donations in kind: Caritas Point Gaby Hagen and clothes bank organized by Christa Bielinski, and others). The goods were delivered to Caritas Grodno, the District Hospital of Grodno, the Tuberculosis Hospital in Grodno as well as 'House of Mercy' in Ross.

August

A second transport of relief goods (donations in kind, incontinence and dressing materials) took place to Caritas Stettin, Poland, to care for elderly and ill people.

September

Father James Puttuparapilli from Kerala, India, paid a visit to Dinslaken. He is our contact person for the TB Project Trivandrum. Cured and released patients are outcast by their families. Our work prevents them from having to live on the street. Our goal is to enable them to help themselves. Their current situation as well as new purchases for 2018 were discussed: clothes for all patients and four sewing machines thus allowing people to help themselves.

September

To our great pleasure, the 38th Leprosy March in Dinslaken was organised and carried out with Protestant Christians. As in the previous years, we welcomed guests who actively participated in our projects: Prof. Gulsum Askarova, dermatologist - venereologist from Almaty, 230 km from the Chinese border, who was accompanied by her daughter from Copenhagen, Denmark.

Dr. Azizullo Qosimov, Head Leprologist and dermatologist – venereologist in Tajikistan (near the Afghan border) accompanied by his wife, who is a doctor of medicine as well.

As in the past years, the participants of the Leprosy March set off from eight different churches carrying banners. After welcoming words by Pastor Barthel Kalscheur and Priest van Eynern the march advanced towards the central point of the town with musical accompaniment. There they were already expected by a group of drummers. Subsequently, the participants returned to Johanna House where the current situation of the projects was presented over coffee and cake. The musical programme also ensured a pleasant atmosphere.

October

Dr Atajan Khamrajev, Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan visited Dinslaken to express his gratitude for our leprosy work. Newspaper articles were published on October 29, 2018 (NRZ and RP).

November

Meeting with Christian women engaged in parish and social projects (newspaper article NRZ and RP November 23, 2018). An overview of all voluntary activities for 2018 and 2019 were discussed.

All year round

Lectures for different organisations and groups. Intensive exchange of information regarding contact persons in all project countries.

III. Additional information

29 years of Leprosy work by the Town of Dinslaken in countries of the former Soviet Union (1990 – 2019)

We have reached our goal to carry out significant changes:

Leprosy people were supplied with leprosy specific medication MDT (Multidrug Therapy) in an area covering 1/6 of the inhabited earth's surface – which is equivalent to the territory of the former Soviet Union. Ill people are cured so that the transmission of Leprosy bacteria has been considerably minimized. New patients and patients suffering from complications and the consequences of an earlier infection still follow treatments. Treating patients with medication has protected them from progressive deformation and mutilation. Invalidity was and still is treated and supported by physiotherapy, surgical interventions and Modulan (gripping-aid).

As a result of this measure, the stigmatisation of Leprosy has been considerably minimized. We have succeeded in connecting some leprosy centres to universities of the country. The Chief Leprologist informs about the latest medical findings every six months. The strong influence of universities will certainly help to eliminate the medieval fear of Leprosy in the near future.

How has this been possible?

There are contact persons in all project countries, which has led to a very close and well-functioning network.

Contact and focus areas:

Diagnostics and new findings of Leprosy:

Dr. Erwin Cooreman, Global Leprosy Programme, Team Leader, New Delhi, India

Therapy: Dr. Dimitr WHO Team, Geneva, Switzerland

Elimination of Leprosy: Mr Yohey Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador, Tokyo, Japan.

High-ranking visitor from Karakalpakstan in Dinslaken

On October 28, 2018 Dr. Atajan Hamrajev, Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan paid a visit to us in Dinslaken.

Since 1996, we have been taking care of leprosy people in this country, being the only international helpers regarding leprosy. This is why the Town of Dinslaken is a symbol of helpfulness and mercy for Karakalpakstan.

22 years ago, my husband and I visited this country on the Aral Sea, which is 9,000 km from Germany, for the first time. We were deeply shocked: The Aral Sea desert covered 80 % of the country. The Aral Sea, being once the most important employer of the region due to the sea's abundance of fish, has shrunk to only 1/5 of its former size. Unemployment forced young people to leave the country and to look for work in places far away. The ill and elderly have stayed. Moreover, compared to the other 15 countries of the former USSR, Karakalpakstan has the highest rate of leprosy. Entering the country at the time was only possible with the written authorization of the Minister of Health.

After our visit to Karakalpakstan we mobilised our town: Several lorries loaded with general and medical relief goods were sent from Dinslaken to Karakalpakstan. Physicians from Karakalpakstan were invited to Dinslaken to establish a closer contact. Thanks to our influence, a Leprosy Conference took place in Krantau, a Leprosarium in Karakalpakstan in the year 2004. Leprologists from Central Asia were invited to participate.

At the end of the conference, my husband and I talked to Dr Hamrajev and asked him to help us organise leprosy help in his country. Our intensive help from Dinslaken amazed the people in Karakalpakstan as well as the government.

However, without the support of our strong partner Dr. Atajan Hamrajev (at the time Vice Minister of Health and now a leading personality in Parliament) who always bears the leprosy people in mind, our commitment would not have been as successful.

The emphasis of our mutual work is the leprosy patient as a person – and this is what has made our work successful.

The Mayor of the Town of Dinslaken, Dr. Heidinger, emphasized the importance of our cooperation during a reception at the town hall. Dr. Hamrajev expressed his gratitude for our efforts, our help and our humanitarian understanding far beyond the national borders for the poorest of the poor: the people suffering from leprosy in his country.