

Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation Wardha



Dr. Claire Vellut

Dr. Claire Vellut, a woman doctor from Belgium determined to serve leprosy affected persons, has rendered more than five decades of selfless service to alleviate the sufferings of leprosy patients. At a very young age itself, while studying in a medical college at Louvain (Belgium), she developed passion to help people especially those with special needs. As destiny would have it, she moved to India in 1954 and joined Dr Frans Hemerijckx, another dedicated leprologist to start a leprosy Project in Polambakkam village, near Chennai. It was to be a leprosy centre “on wheels” and thus started a net work of 'the roadside clinics under the tree' spread over 500 villages. As thousands of leprosy affected persons got benefited from this project, the centre eventually grew to become a model project for mass treatment. The then Madras State Government took over the centre in 1960 and appointed Dr. Vellut as its Director. At the end of 25 years, under the guidance of Dr. Vellut, the centre had taken care of more than 50,000 patients and carried out several epidemiological surveys and research including initial evaluation of multidrug therapy (MDT).

Dr. Vellut opted for Indian nationality in 1979 as she wished to continue to live in the country she had adopted. She was a WHO consultant, adviser to the Government of India and other International agencies to guide leprosy eradication programme. She founded the Damien Foundation India Trust (DFIT) in 1992 and initiated mass-oriented rural leprosy centres in several other states in India similar to the pattern of Polambakkam. Dr. Vellut is currently the Author and Vice-chairman of DFIT. She is a Fellow of the National Academy of Medical Sciences (FAMS). Recognizing her devoted and exemplary services, her alma mater, the University of Louvain has conferred her “doctor honoris causa” in public health and Government of India has awarded her with 'Padmashri'.

In recognition of the distinguished services to the cause of leprosy, the Chairman and Members of Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation do hereby honour Dr. Claire Vellut with

“International Gandhi Award 2011”