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The 60th World Leprosy Day will be commemorated across the globe on Jan 27, 2013. Initiated by French journalist Raoul Follereau (1903–77), the day mostly aims to raise public awareness and to reduce discrimination against people with leprosy and their families. Although leprosy was officially eliminated more than a decade ago, the disease has not been completely eradicated and the scars from the past linger on. Iran, with an annual incidence of less than 100 cases, is among the regions in which strategies recommended by WHO have been implemented successfully thanks to the availability of free multidrug therapy and leprosy elimination campaigns.¹

The last active leprosy colony in Iran, Bababaghi Hospital and Sanatorium, provides free health care and housing for 230 people with treated leprosy and their healthy families. The hospital was founded as a leprosarium for 75 patients in the vicinity of Tabriz, northwest Iran, in 1933. Within 2 years, 600 patients from different regions of the country were assembled and quarantined in this centre, making it the largest leprosarium in the country. Almost a decade later, it housed two-thirds of the whole leprosy population of Iran. In the following years, leprosy patients were forced into further isolation from society and not always given the care they needed.

The French national Alfons David was the first physician to voluntarily devote his life to these people and to educating the locals and missionaries about leprosy.² However, segregation of leprosy patients continued for years, until an Iranian physician, Mohammad Hossein Mobayen, who was inspired by David, convinced society to embrace these isolated patients, earning himself the title of the Father of Leprosy in Iran.³ The elimination of leprosy was realised in Iran thanks to the two fundamental elements of the WHO

strategy: access to early diagnosis and provision of free multidrug treatment. Access to diagnosis was achieved in the 1960s through international educational courses provided by WHO for Iranian physicians in Europe and endemic regions around the world. The first consignment of free anti-leprosy drugs was delivered to Bababaghi Hospital by WHO in 1963—a turning point in the efforts against leprosy in Iran.² In the following years, owing to a decrease in the number of new cases, other leprosaria in Iran were closed and Bababaghi remained the only active university-affiliated centre to provide free health care and social support for leprosy patients and their families.³ Thanks to the continuing support of WHO, the prevalence of leprosy in Iran is now only 0.12 cases per 10 000 general population.³

We declare that we have no conflicts of interest.

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- 1 WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. Leprosy. <http://www.emro.who.int/health-topics/leprosy/> (accessed Dec 23, 2012).
- 2 Tabriz Bababaghi Hospital and Sanatorium. <http://www.mftabriz.com/goodjob/bababagi.aspx> (accessed Dec 23, 2012).
- 3 Azizi MH, Bahadori M. A history of leprosy in Iran during the 19th and 20th centuries. *Arch Iran Med* 2011; **14**: 425–30.