



Press Release - Austrian Leprosy Relief Association

The Austrian Leprosy Relief Association (ALRA) continues the work of Franciscan Leprosy Relief Hörsching: Work shall be continued as part of ALRA's commitment to overcome Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs).

Bregenz / Vienna, 26 January 2016 – *On World Leprosy Day 2016, the Austrian Leprosy Relief Association (ALRA) takes over the former tasks of the Franciscan Leprosy Relief Austria. Both ALRA and the Franciscan Secular Order of Austria (Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis, OFS) agreed on this move; Franciscan Leprosy Relief Hörsching will cease work with immediate effect. Due to joining forces, ALRA and OFS expect further quality improvement of running projects in partner countries, and increased awareness for necessary social change in Austria.*

Since its inception in 1958, Austrian Leprosy Relief Association works for overcoming poverty related diseases/NTDs such as leprosy. Initially, ALRA focused on ad hoc technical assistance, and immediate needs working with e.g. drug shipments. In recent years, focus shifted to targeted contributions aimed at strengthening health systems in East Africa. ALRA invests approximately one million euro p.a. in capacity development. ALRA operates as a Catholic fund, based in Bregenz, Vorarlberg, Austria.

The Franciscan Leprahilfe Hörsching was founded in 1978 by Alois Haidvogel, member of OFS. Haidvogel started a unique fundraising campaign for people affected by leprosy in all Austrian post offices. Based in Hörsching, Upper Austria, the organization used to support various health projects e.g. in Madagascar, Tanzania, Nigeria and Congo with up to 15,000 euros p.a..

Development needs Change

"After 38 years the hand-over of our tasks to ALRA was a necessary step", states Franz Grömer, former head of the Franciscan Leprahilfe that now ceased its work. ALRA will continue the existing projects aimed at overcoming leprosy. Yet, ALRA will set new priorities for these projects. They shall be geared towards sustainable development, and they shall be subject to evaluation. "This would not have been possible for us as a small, completely voluntary organization," emphasizes Grömer.

The Chairman of ALRA's Board of Trustees, Rev. Mag Edwin Matt, sees the hand-over as an opportunity for both organizations: *"We can improve coordination of existing projects, thereby becoming more effective."* Good coordination is a critical precondition for improving healthcare systems in the partner countries of development cooperation. Within Austria, Austrian donors shall be served better, too. ALRA holds the Austrian "Spendengütesiegel", a renowned quality certificate of Austrian Fundraising organizations. Following strict quality standards, donations to ALRA are tax deductible, too. Also, Matt seeks to fundraising. *"It is about development from charity to solidarity - we shall raise awareness that our lifestyle in Austria influences health conditions elsewhere."*

The national head of the Secular Order of Franciscans Austria, Mag Dr. Alfred Obermair, relates the development with Franciscan spirits: *"St. Francis serves us as an example, not only to relieve suffering, but to seek reorientation in our own lives."*

Further information: www.aussaetzigen-hilfswerk.at/