

Pakistan's 'Mother Teresa' Dr Ruth Pfau dies at 87

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Karachi: Ruth Pfau, a German doctor and nun who dedicated her life to eradicating leprosy in Pakistan and has been described as the country's Mother Teresa, has died in Karachi aged 87.

Dr Pfau with Pakistani flood victims in 2010

She died in hospital after being admitted on Friday, her order said.

Dr Pfau witnessed leprosy in Pakistan for the first time in 1960 and returned to set up clinics across the country.

Her efforts meant that in 1996 the disease was declared to have been brought under control.

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said Dr Pfau "may have been born in Germany, but her heart was always in Pakistan".

"Dr Ruth came to Pakistan here at the dawn of a young nation, looking to make lives better for those afflicted by disease, and in doing so, found herself a home," he said, praising her courage and loyalty.

Dr Pfau established leprosy clinics across Pakistan

Harald Meyer-Porzky from the Ruth Pfau Foundation in Würzburg said Dr Pfau had "given hundreds of thousands of people a life of dignity".

Dr Pfau was born in Leipzig in 1929 and saw her home destroyed by bombing during World War Two.

She studied medicine and was later sent to southern India by her order, the Daughters of the Heart of Mary, but a visa issue meant she became stuck in Karachi, where she first became aware of leprosy.

"Well if it doesn't hit you the first time, I don't think it will ever hit you," she told the BBC in 2010.

"Actually the first patient who really made me decide was a young Pathan. He crawled on hands and feet into this dispensary, acting as if this was quite normal, as if someone has to crawl there through that slime and dirt on hands and feet, like a dog."

Dr Pfau received numerous awards in Pakistan and Germany

Dr Pfau rescued disfigured and suffering children who had been confined to caves and cattle pens for years by their parents, who were terrified that they were contagious.

She trained Pakistani doctors and attracted foreign donations, founding Pakistan's National Leprosy Control Programme and the Marie Adelaide Leprosy Centre, which has a presence in every Pakistani province.

Dr Pfau also won praise for her efforts in helping the victims of devastating floods in south-western Pakistan in 2010.

She received numerous honours for her work, including the Hilal-e-Imtiaz - Pakistan's second highest civilian award - in 1979, the Hilal-e-Pakistan in 1989 and the German Stauffer Medal in 2015.

She wrote four books in German about her work in Pakistan, including *To Light A Candle*, which has been translated into English.

Her last rites will be performed on 19 August at St Patrick's Church in Karachi and she will then be buried at the Gora Qabristan Christian cemetery in the city.

German-born nun Ruth Pfau attends a press conference at Marie Adelaide Leprosy Centre in Karachi, Pakistan January 25, 2014. Picture taken January 25, 2014. (Reuters File Photo)

Ruth Pfau (C), head of a Pakistani charity fighting leprosy and blindness, meets people in flood-affected southern Pakistan in December 2010.

Dr Ruth Pfau has been in Pakistan since 1960. Her first encounter with lepers began in a beggar colony in Karachi.

A man holds a candle in front of a portrait of German nun Ruth Pfau, following her death in Karachi, Pakistan. Ruth Pfau, who is considered a contributor to ending leprosy in Pakistan.

