

## **Historical outline of ALERT**

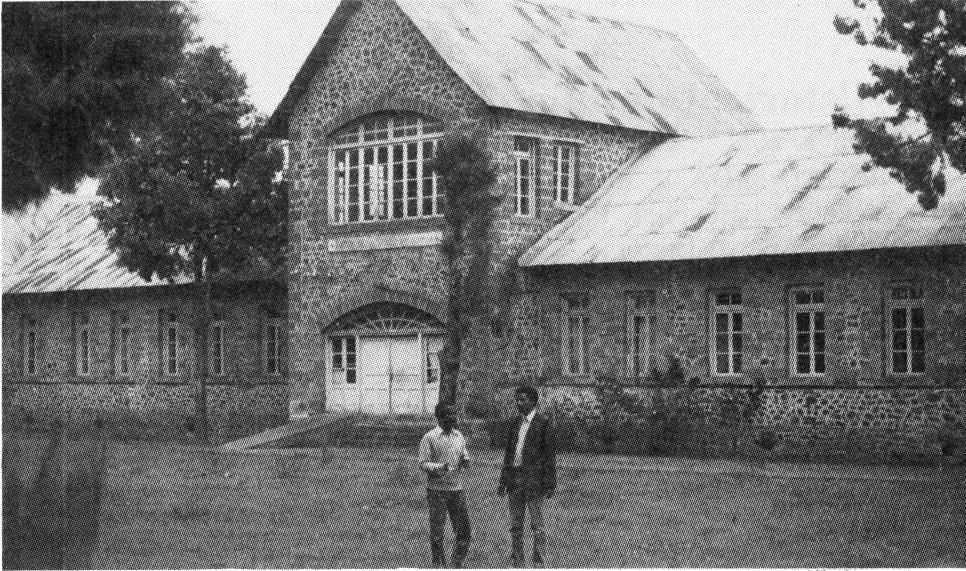
WIDAD KIDANE MARIAM  
Yekatit 12 Hospital, P.O. Box 257,  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

This is the story of the All Africa Leprosy and Rehabilitation Training Centre (ALERT), the story of its birth, growth and development, which started 20 years ago from a small nucleus at the Princess Zenebe-Work Hospital (PZWH), and through the years became a model leprosy education and research centre for Africa.

The tremendous work carried out by a long line of fine and dedicated men and women cannot be portrayed in words, no matter how ably put or expressed, nor can the dimensions and perspectives of the human elements that caused the seed of PZWH to blossom into ALERT as it is today. Therefore, before I attempt to review the history of ALERT with you, I should like to apologize for any unintentional omissions or important events that may have been overlooked.

The year was 1934 when the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), built PZWH in the midst of a gloomy, dismal and overcrowded leprosy village on a hilltop then just outside the city limit of Addis Ababa. Figure 1 shows this building as it stands today on the ALERT compound. Fortunately, the grounds around the hospital were spacious and open, allowing plenty of room for the great number of patients and their relatives who had come to seek medical help from all over the country. In its initial phase both SIM and the American Society for Assistance to Leprosy started the good work at the leprosarium, but they were interrupted by the Italian occupation which forced them to leave the country, leaving behind an overcrowded leprosarium.

The Italians in their turn continued to provide the services at the leprosarium during their 5-year stay in Ethiopia, thus



**Figure 1.** Princess Zenebe-Work Hospital built in 1934 by the Sudan Interior Mission.

encouraging the influx of more patients and their families from all over the country. In an effort to create order and overcome the overcrowding at the leprosarium, the Italians built 30 thatched-roofed brick houses, then known as "the Children Street Section" of the hospital and shown in Figure 2. At present you can find two of these huts standing between the Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI) and the Training Department of ALERT used as the demonstration and the Crafts Shop tukules respectively.

For many years after the Italians left, numerous diligent pioneers, missionary workers as well as volunteers and organizations, continued to provide medical and other care to the ever-increasing number of leprosy patients and their families. In the mid-1950s the MOPH, in an attempt to improve the living conditions at the PZWH, started building the third section of the leprosarium, which consisted of barracks with thatched roofs and chika (mud mixed with straw) walls on stone foundations. One of them is shown in Figure 3. Eventually there were 15 of these barracks each accommodating a minimum of 100 patients with their relatives. Furthermore, construction of the remaining, necessary facilities i.e. the operating,



**Figure 2.** Tukules in "the Children Street Section" of the hospital built by the Italians.

X-ray, examination and treatment rooms, kitchen, utility, library, conference and administration buildings, and the second "Children Street Section" of the hospital, known at present as Ward 5, was eventually made possible through the help and assistance of individuals and organizations in general, and the Swedish Save the Children Fund in particular. Moreover, the leprosarium which had always lacked water, was at last connected to the city water supply system. It is worth pointing out here that during the above period of struggle, Dr. S.K. Schaller was the only physician and Miss Ragnhild Wahlborg the matron of the leprosarium, and their tremendous efforts, hard work and contribution in creating order and better conditions for the unwanted and forsaken leprosy patients and their families cannot be forgotten. They were also instrumental in establishing the very much needed core of health workers in the hospital from their cured patients.

In the meantime, around the early 1960s the government in cooperation with missionary workers, volunteers and organizations settled a great number of cured leprosy patients with their families at Gende Beret, Shashamane and Tibilla in Shoa Province in an attempt at agricultural rehabilitation which was the only sure way of solving the major problem



Figure 3. One of the barracks built in the mid-1950s to improve the living conditions around the Princess Zenebe-Work Hospital.

of overcrowding at the leprosarium.

In 1964, it was interesting to note that the general situation at PZWH had improved, with the barracks out of the way and the hospital staff strengthened by Dr. E. W. Price and Dr. M. Fitzherbert, as well as by a number of qualified national and international health workers.

Furthermore, the idea of establishing a training centre for Africa had already been conceived elsewhere, although the place and site was not yet decided upon. However, Dr. P. W. Brand (International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled) and Dr. S.G. Browne (Leprosy Mission, London) who were delegated to find a suitable place for it, during one of their missions to Ethiopia in late 1964 discovered the potentially rich grounds for leprosy work at PZWH. Hence their findings, coupled with the excellent reception they got both from MOPH and the Medical Faculty of Addis Ababa University (AAU), turned what was then a possibility in their minds to a certainty, namely, "to establish a training center in Addis Ababa for Africa".

Consequently, in December 1965 Dr. P. Brand, Mr. Orie Miller

and Mr. A.D. Askew were delegated by the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled, the American Leprosy Mission and the Leprosy Mission, London, respectively, to establish in cooperation with the MOPH and the Medical Faculty of the AAU, the Training Centre for Africa at PZWH in Addis Ababa.

On December 11, 1965 ALERT was officially founded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The MOPH and AAU together with the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled, the Leprosy Mission, London, and the American Leprosy Mission were the founding members. The main purpose of ALERT was specified as "to train men and women in all aspect of leprosy with special emphasis on control, treatment and rehabilitation for work in African countries". Also, to enable the Centre to pursue its goal, it committed itself "to build up a leprosy service in a limited rural area, which shall demonstrate comprehensive medical care and rehabilitation of leprosy patients as part of a national anti-leprosy campaign and linked with general public health service". Moreover, "to accept full responsibility under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Health for the management of PZWH, and to add staff and facilities for administration, so that it may become a training centre for medical, surgical and paramedical skills needed by leprosy patients".

Thus the seeds of ALERT were sown at PZWH, and the laborious and painful process of its growth and development began.

When MOPH delegated the responsibility of the management of PZWH to the ALERT project, they also contributed in kind by sponsoring Dr. E. Price, the Hospital Director, Dr. M. Fitzherbert, a senior physician, and the matron, Miss P. Radford with all her staff and the hospital budget. Furthermore, the good will and unflinching support of all member and non-member organizations (see Appendix) made it possible for the ALERT project to recruit the required core staff for strengthening and improving the quality of services provided at PZWH, who in turn shouldered the responsibility for making ALERT a reality. They were as follows:

The Rev. D. Sensenig was recruited on 1/5/66 as the business manager, Miss J. Neville on 7/5/66 as occupational therapist, Mr. D. Ward on 1/7/66 as physiotherapist, and Dr. W. Felton Ross on 24/9/66 as the director of the ALERT project. Nevertheless, in order to be able to concentrate on the preparation, planning and implementation of the training component of the project, Dr. W. F. Ross opted to assume the training directorship instead. Therefore, on 15/4/67 Major. O. Niskanen was appointed as the executive director.

In October 1966 the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the member organizations of ALERT was held in Addis Ababa, and the following important decisions were made:

I. Election of officers:

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. President      | Minister of Public Health, at that time H.E. Ato Abebe Kebede       |
| 2. Vice President | President of Addis Ababa University, H. E. Lij Kassa Wolde Mariam   |
| 3. Secretary      | Dr. E. W. Price - Director of PZWH                                  |
| 4. Treasurer      | Dr. W. Don McClure, with Rev. D. Sensenig to act as his substitute. |

II. The executive committee was appointed to carry out the policies and decisions of the AGM until the next meeting with the following members:

- 2 representatives from the Ministry of Public Health
- 2 representatives from the Medical Faculty of A.A.U.
- representatives from the ALERT Staff, and
- 3 representatives among the supporting organizations.

Professor C. S. Leithead, who was then representing the Medical Faculty of AAU was elected as chairman (See Appendix).

III. A medical advisory committee (MAC) was appointed to guide and advise the ALERT project, with the following members:

Dr. P. W. Brand, orthopaedic surgeon  
Dr. Stanley G. Browne, leprologist  
Dr. D. L. Leiker, epidemiologist  
Dr. Olaf Skinsnes, leprosy pathologist

IV. A subcommittee was set up for the proposed Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI). It was reported that the progress of the plans for the Institute was very promising. Both Rädä Barnen, Sweden and Redd Barna, Norway were prepared to sponsor it. The aim of the Institute was to enlarge the knowledge of leprosy through basic research.

During the initial years a great deal was accomplished; general rules were made, various activities were decided upon, and plans for the construction of the new hospital as well as other necessary facilities were worked out. Moreover, the rural area to be used as a field laboratory was established at Debre Berhan. Furthermore, an agreement with MOPH was reached and signed which was effective for an indefinite duration, to be revised every 5 years. Also, in order to increase the activities of ALERT, the MOPH delegated the responsibility for the full management of PZWH to the ALERT project in 1967.

In the meantime, the AGM was held every year except for the second one, which was scheduled for October 1967 and had to be postponed until April 1968. The AGM decides on major issues regarding ALERT's activities and its future development. The AGM also appoints senior staff for ALERT, Officers of the corporation and the members of the board of directors of ALERT to serve for a 2-year term.

During the third AGM, the executive committee, which had reached the end of its 2-year term of office, was dissolved and replaced by the board of directors of ALERT (see Appendix). Professor C. S. Leithead continued to serve as chairman up until October 1975. It is important to note here that Professor Leithead played an important role in the initiation

and formation of ALERT. He also had a major and decisive influence on its further growth and development. Dr. Yayahyirad Kitaw, the vice-chairman, took over as acting chairman until the succeeding AGM. Since then he has continued as chairman of the board of directors until the present time. Under his able chairmanship many important matters have been dealt with in a most efficient way.

Furthermore, the unfailing support and assistance of all members and non-member sponsoring organizations made it possible for all the buildings and facilities needed for the ALERT project to be realized step by step. Briefly one can summarize the development as follows.

In 1968 the foundation stone for the new hospital was laid and the hospital was completed in 1970. The old hospital facilities were converted to accommodate the training unit, and the old laboratory building to accommodate the orthopaedic appliance workshop until 1980, when the newly constructed orthopaedic appliance workshop was completed. Moreover, an improved gate clinic was built in 1968 to improve the general urban leprosy control service, and in 1974 the new gate clinic, as an extension to the hospital out-patient department was completed. Furthermore, in 1969 the very much needed water tank was erected and AHRI with its staff houses was completed. To be able to provide the much needed accommodation and acceptable services for all the trainees and guests, the student hostel buildings and the cafeteria facilities were completed in 1970, and depending on availability of funds and other priorities, staff houses and other supportive service buildings were gradually constructed.

In the meantime Dr. W. Felton Ross was busy developing his Department of Training. In 1967 he made an exploratory visit within and outside Ethiopia in order to prepare the ground for the future work of ALERT. The outcome of his endeavour was:

1. It was decided that the rural area, that was to be used for training leprosy field workers in the methodology of survey and leprosy control, should be in the north eastern parts of Shoa including Menz and Yifat, Tagulet



and Bulga, with the centre at Debre Berhan.

2. It was clear that ALERT was both needed and wanted by all the African countries visited. The general opinion was that it should concentrate on training senior technical staff and that priority should be given to the following areas:

- (i) Physiotherapy
- (ii) Rural area supervisors
- (iii) Medical officers and other health workers with emphasis on the care of the feet.

3. ALERT should provide suitable teaching materials on leprosy, and also prepare a system of record-keeping and data collection which could be standardised throughout Africa.
4. ALERT should participate in, and help to finance and organise seminars at suitable centres both inside and outside Ethiopia.
5. ALERT should provide scholarships for trainees.

To this end, and as a preparatory step, the training unit conducted in service training courses in leprosy for nurses and advanced dressers for ALERT staff, as well as 9-month physiotherapy courses for men who were trained to provide technical services at the physiotherapy section at ALERT. Also, intensive courses for leprosy field workers were given and 7 of the successful students were employed for the Rural Unit at Debre Berhan and the remainder at PZWH.

Consequently, both international and national training courses were conducted regularly throughout the year. It is very encouraging to note that the number of indigenous African trainees has been increasing since 1980.

Briefly, the following trainees have participated in the various training programmes provided.

*Widad Kidane Mariam*

International courses	Up to 1985	1985
Doctors	387	50
Supervisors	393	40
Physiotherapists	70	5
Rehabilitation technicians	57	
Laboratory technicians	50	50
Orthopaedic workshop technicians	31	70
II. National courses	Up to 1985	1985
Medical students	379	76
Nursing students	694	146
Tutors	21	
Health assistants	407	

Furthermore, the training department has actively participated in international training programmes, conferences and seminars over the years, given in both English or French depending on the availability of staff at the time. Moreover, a great deal of effort has been put into the preparation of teaching material suitable for various health workers (see Appendix). Most of the manuals and guides produced are very useful and very much in demand.

In summary, one can say that a great deal has been achieved by the training department, and most of the credit goes to its first director, Dr. W. F. Ross, who had played an important role in the initiation and development of ALERT.

In addition, valuable and successful contributions were made by the other senior staff of the department. Their tremendous efforts to maintain a high standard during the difficult period of ALERT's development will not be forgotten.

In concluding my review, I would like to briefly mention some of the remaining important events in the history of ALERT:

1967 - an agreement was signed between ALERT and AHRI, and the Institute was inaugurated in 1970. Its first director, Dr. Morten Harboe, took office in 1969 and joined the ALERT board of directors in August that year. It is important to note here that the Institute has always played a vital part in the

setting up and development of ALERT.

1976 - the study group on the goals of ALERT presented a summary of the goals, targets and activities for the ALERT project.

1978 - many of the ALERT/AHRI staff participated in the XI International Leprosy Congress, which was arranged in Mexico City.

1979 - The 12-year period of office, in which Major O. Niskanen had given devoted and valuable service as the first executive director ended. He was very rightly referred to as "the man worth more than his weight in gold". The great achievements ALERT can now congratulate itself on are to a great extent due to his tremendous and valuable contributions as well as those of his successor Mr. B. Johannessen.

1981 - ALERT was designated as a WHO collaborating centre for training in leprosy.

1982 - ALERT was awarded the Gold Mercury International Award Ad Honorem in recognition of its work in the African continent. That same year the first tuberculosis course was held at ALERT, and the MDT pilot project was implementet.

1985 - Mr. B. Johannessen terminated his work at ALERT after 6 years of devoted service as executive director contributing greatly to the development of the institution.

Finally, ALERT could not have achieved its present level of excellence without the tremendous contributions of its board of directors. It goes without saying that, under the able chairmanship and guidance of Dr. Yayehyirad Kitaw, they have played an unusual and significant part in both the development and achievements of ALERT. Moreover, without the unfailing support and assistance of all member and non-member organizations (see Appendix), the seed that was sown over 20 years ago at PZWH would never have grown into what ALERT is today. Hence, for ALERT and all the parties concerned, I can say that "this is the end of the beginning".

I Members of ALERT

American Leprosy Missions (Founder Member)  
Ministry of Public Health, Ethiopia (Founder Member)  
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (Founder Member)  
Rehabilitation International (Founder Member)  
The Leprosy Mission, London (Founder Member)  
Associazione Nazionale Amici dei Lebbrosi, Italy  
Christoffel Blindenmission, Germany  
Dutch Government Technical Aid, Ministry of Foreign  
Affairs  
Emmaus Suisse  
German Leprosy Relief Association  
Mennonite Mission, USA  
Netherlands Leprosy Relief Association  
Norwegian Save the Children Fund  
Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development  
Cooperation  
Swedish Red Cross  
Swedish Save the Children Fund  
World Council of Churches (WCC) and its member organizations

II Non-member

Agence Canadienne de Development Internationale (ACDI)  
Danish Save the Children Fund  
Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA)  
Fame Pereo, Canada  
Interchurch Coordination Committee for Development  
Projects (ICCO), The Netherlands  
LEPRA, Colchester, UK  
Raoul Follereau Foundation, France  
Raoul Follereau Foundation, Luxembourg  
World Council of Churches, Swedish National Committee  
Organization Netherlands Volunteers

III 1966 Executive Committee

Professor C.S. Leithead	- Chairman	Addis Ababa University
Professor Sehofield	- Member	Addis Ababa University
Professor Y. Larsson	- Member	Sponsoring organization
Dr. D. McClure	- Member	Spondoring organization
WCC representative	- Member	Spondoring organization
Dr. W. F. Ross	- Member	ALERT
Rev. D. Sensenig	- Member	ALERT
Dr. E. W. Price	- Secretary	Ministry of Public Health
Dr. B.E.C. Hopwood	- Member	Ministry of Public Health

IV 1969 ALERT Board of Directors

Professor C.S. Leithead	- Chairman	Addis Ababa University
Dr. R. Geil	- Member	Addis Ababa University
Dr. B.E.C. Hopwood	- Member	Ministry of Public Health
Dr. E. W. Price	- Member	Ministry of Public Health
Professor Y. Larsson	- Member	Sponsoring organization
Mr. P. Gingrich	- Vice Chairman	Sponsoring organization
Mr. M. Mageröy	- Member	Sponsoring organization
Dr. W. Don McCline	- Member	Sponsoring organization
Dr. Jamal Abdul Kadir	- Member	Ethiopian Medical Association
Major Onni Niskanen	- Member	ALERT
Ato Negussie W. Aregai	- Member	Princess Zenebe-Work Hospital
Dr.G.Connacher (invited)	- Member	Duke of Harar Memorial Hospital

V 1985 Annual General Meeting of ALERT

President: Brigader General Dr. Gizaw Tsehai  
Minister of Health of Ethiopia

Vice President: Dr. Widad Kidane Mariam  
Yekatit 12 Hospital, Ministry of Health

Dr. Abiye Kifle, President of Addis Ababa  
University

Board of Directors

Dr. Yayehyirad Kitaw	- Chairman	Independent Member
Dr. Jemal Abdul Kadir	- Member	Addis Ababa University
Dr. Bayou Teklu	- Member	Addis Ababa University
Dr. Milkias Shamebo	- Member	Ethiopian Medical Association
Ato Atnafu Tariku	- Member	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Professor S. Britton	- Member	AHRI
Professor Morten Harboe	- Member	Norwegian Save the Children Fund
Mr. Herman Kober	- Member	ILEP
Dr. Per Olcén	- Member	Swedish Save the Children Fund
Dr. Mesfin Demissie	- Member	World Health Organization
Dr. Amin H. Salama	- Member	Organization of African Unity
Ato Tadelle Tedla	- Member	Ministry of Health
Dr. Taye Tokon	- Member	Ministry of Health
Dr. Widad Kidane Mariam	- Member	Independent member

Ex-Officio Members

Mr. Urban Gjerulf	ALERT
Dr. Taye Tadesse	ALERT
Dr. S.J. Nkinda	ALERT
Dr. M. Becx Bleumink	ALERT
Ato Adane Kassa	ALERT

VI Executive Directors

Major Onni Niskanen	April 1967	-	April 1979
Mr. Bernt Johannessen	April 1979	-	Sept. 1985
Mr. Urban Gjerulf	Sept. 1985	-	To date

VII Directors of Hospital Services

Dr. E. W. Price	1965	-	Nov. 1970
Dr. W. F. Ross	Nov. 1970	-	Sept. 1974
Dr. Berhanu Getahun	Sept. 1974	-	May 1976
Dr. Mesfin Demissie	June 1976	-	Aug. 1979
Dr. Fekade Yosef	Sept. 1979	-	Dec. 1980
Dr. Taye Tadesse	April 1981	-	To date

VIII Directors of Training

Dr. W. F. Ross	Sept. 1966	-	May 1976
Dr. H. Wheate	June 1976	-	Jan. 1980
Dr. J. Warndorff	July 1980	-	June 1984
Dr. S.J. Nkinda	August 1985	-	To date

IX Deputy Directors of Training

Dr. J. Nsibambi	August 1979	-	1984
Dr. N.B.B. Reddy	Dec. 1985	-	To date

X Directors of Leprosy Control

Dr. E. W. Price	Nov. 1970	-	1984
Dr. J. Cap	April 1971	-	June 1979
Dr. W. Beaumont	Nov. 1979	-	June 1983
Dr. M. Becx Bleumink	June 1983	-	To date

24 *Widad Kidane Mariam*

XI Business Managers

Mr. D. S. Sensenig	May 1966	- 1970
Mr. K. W. McClenaghan	1970	- 1974
Ato Issias Tessema	1974	- 1976
Ato Getahun Mola	1976	- 1979
Ato Haile Taye	1979	- 1983
Ato Asnake G. Giorgis	1983	- 1984
Ato Adane Kassa	1985	- To date

XII Medical Advisory Committee

1984 - 1986

Professor M. Harboe (Chairman)  
Dr. A. J. de Rijk  
Dr. W. F. Ross  
Dr. M. F. R. Waters

1986 - 1988

Dr. W. F. Ross (Chairman)  
Dr. P. Olcén  
Dr. A. J. de Rijk  
Dr. M. F. R. Waters

XIII ALERT Publications

- A Guide to Leprosy for Field Staff  
W. F. Ross, 1975, 1977, 1983.  
French translation by J. B. A. Van Droogenbroeck, 1975.  
Arabic translation by Haider Abu Ahmed.



- Essentials of Leprosy  
W. F. Ross, 1973.  
J. M. H. Pearson and H. W. Wheate, 1979.  
J. M. H. Pearson, 1986.
  
- A Guide to Health Education in Leprosy  
J. P. Neville, 5th ed. 1983.
  
- A Foot Wear Manual for Leprosy Control Programmes  
Part I. P. J. Neville, 3rd ed. 1983.  
Part II. P. J. Neville, 2nd ed. 1983.
  
- Practical Guide to the Diagnosis and Treatment of Leprosy in the Basic Health Unit  
H. W. Wheate and J. M. H. Pearson, 3rd ed. 1985.
  
- Management of Paralytic Deformities in Leprosy  
J. G. Andersen and J. W. Brandsma, 1984.
  
- Manual for Implementation of Multiple Drug Therapy of Leprosy  
M. Becx-Bleumink, 1985.