

DR KIRAN MARTIN

Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*

Dr Kiran Martin is founder and director of [Asha](#), a non- government organisation working to raise health standards and improve community development in slum communities in and around New Delhi. She has devoted her whole life to improving the lives of slum dwellers and today is recognised as a visionary leader in urban health and social justice. She leads and inspires an organisation that has transformed the lives of more than 900,000 people in around 100 slum colonies in Delhi and its surrounds. Her empathy and determination has attracted supporters from all parts of the world, including The University of Melbourne through the Nossal Institute, the Australia India Institute and the formation of *Australian Friends of Asha for Slums* by former Chancellor Alex Chernov AC and Deputy Chancellor Rob Johanson.

Dr Martin studied at the University of Delhi's Maulana Azad Medical College, gaining a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery degree. She then specialised in Paediatrics at Lady Hardinge Medical College within the same university. In 1988, Dr Martin heard about a cholera outbreak in a south Delhi slum. She was inspired to use her talents to help the poor and marginalised, so she went to the slum, set up a borrowed table under a tree, and began working to save lives. As Dr Martin learned more about the hardships and deprivation faced by the people there, started to devise ways to address their problems. After some time, and with growing cooperation from the grateful community and the Indian government, she founded Asha Community Health and Development Society.

Dr Martin's model for Asha was founded with a strong desire to deliver social justice and to change the socio- economic factors of health and education impacting people's lives in the vast, sprawling megapolis of Delhi. Asha's approach directly challenges the caste and class system existing in Indian society. It seeks to redress the unequal treatment of women by empowering them to bring about change in their own communities. The foundation, now 35 years old, has benefited millions of lives of impoverished people in slum colonies in Delhi.

During the pandemic, Dr Martin was tireless in adapting Asha's support to save lives and support the livelihoods of the most vulnerable in Delhi. Her work is hugely impressive from a humanitarian perspective and is an outstanding case study of the benefits of an innovative approach to community empowerment.

A constant theme of Dr Martin's career has been the importance of education. Asha has supported more than 4500 students across its slum communities to receive a university education, including Masters and PhD studies at Australian universities, namely the University of Melbourne, Sydney and Queensland.

Asha's health intervention programs cover a wide range of issues, including antenatal, postnatal and paediatric care, family planning, infertility and reproductive services, chronic disease management and treatment. Some notable achievements include an infant mortality rate of 11 per 1000 live births compared to the Indian national average of 28.3 per 1000 live births and a tuberculosis mortality rate across Asha's slums of 1 per 1 million, compared to the Indian national average of 32 per 1 million.

Supported by the Ministry of Finance, Asha led the introduction of bankcards and ATMs into slums, along with a financial inclusion programme providing financial literacy and a social support network for the slum communities.

Dr Martin has invested a lifetime of effort to develop health, education, sanitation, gender equality and financial inclusion in the slum communities of New Delhi. In founding and working through Asha, Dr Martin has far exceeded the work of a typical doctor or healthcare provider. She has created an organisation that has reached and improved millions of people's lives in India and achieved outcomes envied and emulated by governments and international organisations. Her achievements have also been recognised and supported by registered Friends of Asha societies in Great Britain, Ireland, Australia and the USA. In addition, funding agencies such as in New Zealand and The Netherlands support Asha's work, alongside international governmental agencies such as Irish Aid, NZ Aid, the Japanese government's GGP programme and AusAid.

Asha's work has been recognised as 'best practice' by the United Nations' Habitat program. In 2002, Dr Martin's achievements were recognised by the Indian Government when she was awarded the Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian awards, by the President of India. Asha's work has influenced both state and national slum policies, and Dr Martin has worked with several ministers within the Indian and Delhi Governments in the portfolios of Home Affairs, Finance, and Health. In addition to appearances before the US House of Representatives and the British House of Commons, Dr Martin has been an international speaker for many years. She has lectured at Harvard, MIT and Cambridge and has spoken at numerous international conferences. Visitors to Asha slums have included former Prime Minister, Ms Julia Gillard, the Governor General of New Zealand, Mr Anand Satyanand, and the First Lady of Japan, Mrs Miyuki Hatoyama, as well as Cabinet Ministers from Ireland, the UK, Japan, New Zealand and Australia.

In 2023, Dr Kiran Martin was conferred with the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*) by the University of Sydney in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the interests and welfare of the poor people of Delhi and for her leadership in civil society.

Kiran Martin's life's work has made a contribution of the highest significance to addressing the poverty and inequality experienced by Indian slum dwellers. The University wishes to recognise a highly significant international leader through the award of a Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa*.