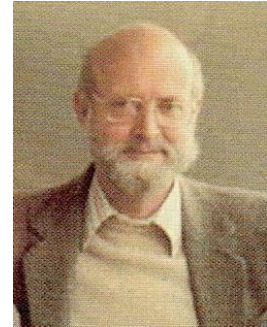


## Olle Hansson Award presented by Dato' Seri Anwar Fazal

Dr Olle Hansson was an icon of the activist medical profession and wrote a classic in medical investigative exposure. The book was called 'INSIDE CIBA GEIGY' and published in Penang, Malaysia in 1989. It is an amazing piece and we like to quote from the foreword written by **Anwar Fazal**, former President of International Organisation of Consumers Union (IOCU), co-founder of Health Action International (HAI) and the instigator for the idea of a Peoples Health Assembly.

*'Olle was a very special inspiration to us. His courage, his competence, his commitment were rare in a profession that is more often too comfortable or too implicated to speak out against a powerful industry.'* His passing on 23 May 1985 was mourned not by words but by a series of actions that will continue to inspire those working to see a more responsible pharmaceutical industry worldwide.'



The Award was first given in 1987. The recipients included Dr Mira Shiva of India; Dr Alfredo Bengzon of the Philippines; Prof Dzulkifli Abdul Razak of USM, Malaysia; and Dr K Balasubramaniam.

The Award recognises the work of an individual from a developing country who best demonstrates the qualities of Dr Olle Hansson in promoting the rational use of drugs. *'It is time to act! It is time to act for all of us who believe in human dignity and justice'*.

### Olle Hansson Award 2023

**Dr Claudio Schuftan** is a freelance public health consultant in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and an ex-adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of International Health at the Tulane School of Public Health in New Orleans, USA. He is a Chilean national and got his MD and paediatrics degree in his native country. Since 1975, he has been working on nutrition, Primary Health Care and human rights issues in more than 50 countries the world over. From 1988-1995 he worked in Kenya. He has lived in Vietnam since 1995 and consults worldwide. He started working on human rights issues in the late 90s and is the author of a fortnightly column, the Human Rights Reader; over 390 of these Readers can be found on his website [www.claudioschuftan.com](http://www.claudioschuftan.com). He has been associated with HAIAP since 1995 and he is one of the founding members of the People's Health Movement. Claudio is co-recipient of the Olle Hansson Award 2023.



**Professor Michael Lim Tan** trained in Veterinary Medicine (DVM, University of the Philippines, Diliman, 1977), Anthropology (MA, Texas A and M University, 1981) and Medical Anthropology (PhD, University of Amsterdam, 1996). He worked with social action programs from 1977 to 1981, mainly in community-based health programs in Mindanao and in Luzon, and with a community-based tuberculosis control program. He founded the health NGO, Health Action Information Network (HAIN), among the first HAIAP partners, concentrating on research and information for community-based health programmes, government and non-government health agencies, mass media and legislators. HAIN played a major role in pushing for health reforms in the Philippines around providing safe and affordable pharmaceuticals, and responding to HIV and AIDS and reproductive health needs. Michael and HAIN made major contributions to HAIAP resources. He began teaching in the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1985 and became Anthropology Field School Director in 1997, then Chair of the Anthropology Department, Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy and, from 2014 to 2020, Chancellor of UP Diliman. During his term, he encouraged faculty, students and staff to engage the world outside, including speaking out on national issues. Michael Tan is co-recipient of the Olle Hansson Award 2023.



### 2023 Recipients' response

#### Claudio Schuftan

I may be the first Olle Hansson award recipient who is a lucky to be a non-affected individual who has taken enterovioform. I grew up with it -- taking it for every occasional childhood diarrheal episode in my native Chile!

I remind you, at least 11,000 persons were affected worldwide by enterovioform<sup>1</sup>.

You all know about Olle Hansson's seminal book, *Inside Ciba-Geigy*, so central to what HAIAP is all about. The book was published in its second (English) edition posthumously right here in Penang about 4 years after his premature death at age 49 from cancer.

Interestingly, he died almost to the day 2 months after CIBA GEIGY took the drug off the market all over the world (...so they said) and apologised to the victims shedding crocodile tears.

What we have to learn is that we should become more comfortable to speak out against Big Pharma since Ciba-Geigy's (now NOVARTIS) behavior was/is no worse than that of most of its competitors. All need to be confronted.

This speaking out means for us today forging much more aggressive relationships with the media; greater stamina to see the battle through including -- like Dr Hansson did, acting as expert witnesses and unearthing secret internal records of Big Pharma, as well as making key contacts and referrals.

Let us not forget how much work there is still to be done: in 2023, the market is still flooded with dangerous formulations -- many of them irrational. But, as somebody said, we are not only talking about hazardous products, we are also talking about hazardous technologies and hazardous policies, not least the TRIPs plus agenda.

Dr Hansson was of the opinion that cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry was possible and he tried to talk to CIBA. Thirty eight years later, I think we have learned this is but a pipe dream.

We have just passed May 23, the Olle Hansson Day - his birthday (Anti-hazardous drugs day). It must be celebrated as a day of commitment to action. So, in his spirit, our meeting here must be three days of action for rational drug policies.

In my case, the struggle has been more in related fields. Many of you here know about my work in food and nutrition, in maternal and child health and in human rights (primarily the right to health and to food).

I have been in the midst of challenging and exciting moments in the history of the political economy of health be it in WHO, in FAO, In the HR Council --and, of course in HAIAP, in Peoples Health Movement (PHM) and in the World Public Health Nutrition Association (WPHNA).

A unique bond unites us all here today, a bond of ideals, of common struggles, of dedication, a bond of stubbornness - and I let you add to the list of our bonds. It has been a tough ride. I always say one of 2 steps forward and 1 ¾ backwards, but here we are with white hair, bald heads, wrinkling faces and with a scar from our smallpox vaccine -- but we are still at it. If I had a glass right now, I would drink to it!

True, the Olle Hansson Award was not awarded each year. So much more of an honour for Michael and for me, now that HAIAP has made it a point to award it regularly. We all must draw strength and inspiration from this true unsung hero's efforts. Yes, *'Now is the time for Action'* is still the rallying call for the times to come. Long live our struggle! --a struggle that we simply must pass on to the next generation.

## **Michael Tan**

I smile thinking of how many of us had to educate ourselves not just on the technical aspects of pharmaceuticals but the whole wild world of business models and advertising ethics and government regulations. One of my first assignments was to attend the first WHO 'expert' committee meeting to formulate national drug policies, something which very much impressed our first Health Secretary - Dr Alfredo Bengzon - under the post-martial law regime, who listened as we told him about what all the health and consumer activists were doing. Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury and Gonoshasthaya Kendra so

---

<sup>1</sup> *Eterovioform* (clioquinol) was found to cause SMON (subacute myelo-optic neuropathy). SMON is an iatrogenic disease of the nervous system leading to a disabling paralysis, blindness and even death. Its defining manifestation was as an epidemic in Japan during the 1960s. Its manufacturer, Ciba-Geigy, has publicly stated that 'Medical products manufactured and sold by us have been responsible for the occurrence of SMON in Japan, we extend our apologies.'

SMON was first observed and diagnosed in Sweden 1966, by Olle Hansson. Clioquinol was marketed as a prophylaxis to tourist diarrhoea. Dr. Olle Hansson was in the front line, fighting for a ban of clioquinol. Doctors in many countries boycotted Ciba-Geigy for many years. Not until 1985 was the pharmaceutical withdrawn. Dr Hansson died a few months later. The day of his death, May 23, is observed as the Anti-Hazardous Drug Day in several parts of the world.

impressed him that he pushed for a Generics Law, one of the most comprehensive of its kind in the world, with all kinds of safeguards against the tricks of the trade of Big Pharma.

Dr Bengzon, the health secretary who was also one of the first recipients of the Olle Hanson Award, set up a National Drugs Committee and other mechanisms to bring in rational drug use, some with far reaching effects, for example price monitoring and price caps.

Today we remember Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury and Gonoshasthaya Kendra, and Olle and his fight against Ciba Geigy and cloquinol, and the many other campaigns that reshaped government policies, medical education, and consumer choices.

We must remember Olle, Zafrullah and our other pioneers.

We must fight for information, but more than that we have the courage to dare to dream of alternatives rather than just accepting a status quo.

Today, the challenges have become more formidable.

The Covid pandemic highlighted the continuing struggles, on the biomedical front as with access to vaccines as well as access to information. The infodemic of fake news and disinformation continues to worsen, almost becoming trivial because messages are so pervasive. Deceptive advertisements continue to be a major problem globally and we might forget that sometimes, it is not just because of big pharma but also because of social media and other traditional grapevines. I was surprised just yesterday, when researching on hormones, to find that diethylstilbestrol, a very old estrogen, is now being sold, illegally and online in China, to women trying to curb their wayward husbands' libidos.

I despair hearing of kids killing themselves because of Tiktok challenges (the latest, involving diphenhydramine. In the 70s diphenhydramine was an anti-allergy drug - a popular cheap drug for drug dependents. The Tiktok diphenhydramine challenge, involves consuming large quantities of diphenhydramine.<sup>2</sup>

Many of our causes have been co-opted, in the distorted information around medicinal plants, around supplements, which often prey on the poor. I think of a recent project we completed where peasants were paying P40 (about US80 cents) for a sachet of 'power herbs' that turned out to be nothing more than sugar, our lab analysis found.

I would like to end with an appeal to keep remembering our struggles go beyond rational drug use. Our struggles are tied to health justice. The radical generics act of 50 years ago was important, but today, the very poor continue to struggle to afford even so-called cheap generics act. Moreover, the tricks of pharmaceutical marketing continue, in the way drugstore clerks are still taught to offer buyers their 'options' as against 'generics lang', generics only? The implication is that surely the consumer wants something 'better than', that is more expensive than, generics.

We need to keep reminding ourselves that our struggles have been mainly around information, and that there are so many new, and often insidious, channels for misinformation. We have to find new platforms, new strategies to get to the different stakeholders and partners.

---

<sup>2</sup> The challenge involves participants taking 12-14 pills, nearly double the recommended daily dosage and ten times the recommended dose for a six-hour period, of the over-the-counter-drug diphenhydramine to induce hallucinations, and filming their side effects. According to the FDA, participating in the dangerous trend can lead to 'serious heart problems, seizures, coma, or even death'.