



IOCC

INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

Assyrian Children Bear Scars Of War, Face New Challenges In Exile

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Baltimore, MD — Desperate to flee the onslaught of violence surrounding his village near Hasakah, Syria, Charbel remembers how frightened he was when his family barely escaped their home before they saw it destroyed by their attackers. The 14-year-old Assyrian boy left behind all of his possessions, friends, and school, but still carries his memories of Syria before the war and a wish to become a dentist someday.

Cynthia, 9, lived through similar terror when she and her parents were forced to quickly leave their home in the Syrian village of Tel Arbosh at dawn as the sounds of shooting could be heard in the distance. She is not sure what happened to her house or the family's belongings. Cynthia says she feels safe in Lebanon, but misses her school in Syria where she excelled at reading and writing in her third grade class.

Assyrian Christians, an ethnic minority group who speak a modern form of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus, are being forced out of lands they have occupied for millennia. More than 1,000 Assyrian families from Syria have found safety behind Lebanon's borders after being targeted last February in attacks on villages stretching along the southern bank of the Khabour River. Their attackers burned homes and churches, murdered a fleeing 16-year-old boy, and abducted more than 200 Assyrian Christian men, women and children from their homes.

In Iraq, hundreds of Assyrian Christian families have faced similar suffering and sought refuge in Lebanon. Now as refugees, the parents struggle to provide food, shelter, and an education for their children. International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), with support from relief partner, Norwegian Church Aid, is addressing the urgent humanitarian needs of more than 1,000 vulnerable Assyrian refugee families with the distribution of food, housing assistance and education support for their children.

The need for food is a top priority for the exiled Assyrian families and IOCC is responding with the distribution of dry food parcels as well as vouchers that can be used to buy items like fresh produce and milk at local markets. Housing is also a serious concern for refugee families without the means to pay for rent when job opportunities are extremely limited and income is scarce. IOCC is helping relieve those concerns with rent assistance to ensure shelter as they adjust to their new and unsettling status as refugees.

For the refugee parents and children alike, the disruption to education is a source of great anxiety. A large number of the Assyrian refugee children arrived in Lebanon with their parents after the registration deadline for the current school year. IOCC is providing 128 primary school-aged refugee children with tuition support at a local Assyrian school, but they face new challenges in the classroom. In Lebanon's primary schools, all subjects are



Learning math and reading in French instead of their native Arabic has been a challenge for Syrian refugees Cynthia, 9, and her classmate, David, 8. They are among 128 Assyrian refugee students receiving IOCC assistance to continue their schooling in Lebanon. IOCC is providing more than 1,000 Assyrian Christian families exiled from their homes in Syria with food, housing assistance, and education support as they adjust to their new and unsettling status as refugees in Lebanon. *photo: Ramzi Haidar/IOCC*

taught in English or French, while Arabic is taught as a separate subject. Syria's school curriculum, by contrast, is all taught in Arabic. The language barrier has forced Arabic speaking refugee students like Charbel and Cynthia to be placed in lower grades with younger children until they master the new languages.

The school's administrator says that teachers are voluntarily putting in longer hours to help the refugee students catch up to their Lebanese classmates. This summer, the school will narrow the language gap further by offering an accelerated French course to the Assyrian refugee students. "We need to help them or they will be out in the streets," said Maroun Marokel, director of St. George Assyrian School. "They are all of our children, and we must care for them and their future. IOCC's support has made it possible for us to help our children learn."

IOCC, an ACT Alliance member, is providing immediate and ongoing humanitarian assistance to refugee families who have endured four years of Syria's brutal civil war. Since 2012, IOCC has provided relief to nearly 2.9 million people displaced inside Syria, or living as refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Armenia.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can help the victims of poverty and conflicts around the world by making a financial gift to the IOCC International Emergency Response Fund which will provide immediate relief, as well as long-term support through the provision of emergency aid, recovery assistance and other support to help those in need. To make a gift, please visit iocc.org or call toll free at 1-877-803-IOCC (4622), or mail a check or money order payable to IOCC, P.O. Box 17398, Baltimore, MD 21297.

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

IOCC is the official humanitarian aid agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. Since its inception in 1992, IOCC has delivered \$534 million in relief and development programs to families and communities in more than 50 countries. IOCC is a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of more than 140 churches and agencies engaged in development, humanitarian assistance and advocacy, and a member of InterAction, the largest alliance of U.S.-based secular and faith-based organizations working to improve the lives of the world's most poor and vulnerable populations. To learn more about IOCC, visit iocc.org.

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