



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

SHARING GOOD

SPRING 2015

## BRINGING COMFORT TO MOTHERS AND CHILDREN IN WAR TORN SYRIA



IOCC/GOPA

Freezing temperatures, heavy snow and chilling winds across Syria are putting thousands of young lives at risk as mothers struggle to keep their small children warm and sheltered from harsh winter conditions. Many live in shelled out buildings with no doors or windows to keep frigid weather out, or in temporary shelters with no heat. The need for warm clothing is great.

IOCC is responding with hand-made sweater sets for 600 children crafted last summer by 34 displaced Syrian women taught to knit through a cash-for-work program. IOCC and its Syria church partner, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA), offered the one-

month training as a way to help the country's most vulnerable families achieve some financial independence. The new skills help provide vital income for the women and their families while displaced Syrian children benefit by receiving warm clothes to protect them against bitter cold.

Along with the training, IOCC/GOPA also provides the wool and needles used to craft hand-knit sweaters and leggings for displaced infants and toddlers. Many of the knitters, unemployed and displaced widows with no source of income, are especially grateful for the new job skills that allow them to work where they live and remain with their own children.

The cash-for-work program established in 2013 by IOCC/GOPA has provided an essential source of income to more than 1,500 jobless Syrians struggling to provide for their families during four years of war.

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FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

Hanging on the wall of my office at IOCC is a copy of the famous *Life* magazine cover in which Archbishop Iakovos of blessed memory stands beside Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. following the historic 1965 civil rights march in Selma, Alabama. Below the image are inscribed the words spoken by His Eminence on that momentous day: "Our Church has never hesitated to fight, when it felt it must, for the rights of mankind... there are times when we must risk everything, including life itself, for those basic American ideals of freedom, justice, equality without which this land cannot survive. Our hope and prayer then, is that we may be given strength to let God know by our acts and deeds, and not only by our words, that...we too, are the espousers and the fighters in a struggle for which we must be prepared to risk our all."

IOCC was established in 1992 to bring these ideals to life. Each day, our staff goes out into the world, with your support, to offer relief to those in need, without discrimination. Helping displaced Syrian mothers protect their children from the cold. Restoring flood damaged schools and children's access to learning in the Balkans. Ensuring that families in Gaza have clean and safe water to drink.

It's been 50 years since that day when Archbishop Iakovos took a bold stand in Selma. Our challenge before God is to continue to fight against hunger and despair, poverty and inequality.

In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou  
Executive Director & CEO

GAZA FAMILIES FACE  
GROWING WATER CRISIS

For Suha, 10, and her friend, Nada, 9, each day begins with a visit to a communal water storage tank in the Gaza neighborhood of Shuja'iyeh. They patiently wait their turn to fill numerous empty plastic water cans that they must haul back to their homes a quarter mile away. Each filled container can weigh over 40 pounds. It's a heavy burden for a young child, but without the daily trips their families would go without water for drinking and washing.

Homes and infrastructure, including the water and sanitation systems, suffered heavy damage during last summer's conflict in Gaza. The widespread destruction left thousands of families displaced and with no safe, reliable source of water. IOCC, with support from relief partner, Norwegian Church Aid, is responding to this urgent and most basic need with water delivery to 20 large refillable water storage tanks installed by IOCC in the affected communities. The balloon-like bladders with a capacity of more than 900 gallons each ensure access to clean water for more than 27,600 vulnerable people living in Beit Hanoun, Shuja'iyeh, and Khan Younis neighborhoods of the Gaza Strip. IOCC is also providing affected families with hygiene kits, dignity kits and cleaning supplies for laundry and living spaces.

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC) is the official humanitarian relief agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America and a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of churches and agencies engaged in development, humanitarian assistance and advocacy.

IOCC, in the spirit of Christ's love, offers emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church to so respond.



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## SUDANESE REFUGEES STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN NEW LAND

The thousands of South Sudanese families who fled the bloodshed from their country's civil war now face new hardships as refugees in Ethiopia. More than 196,000 South Sudanese, of which two-thirds are children, have endured months of living out in open fields with little shelter from the searing sun, torrential rains, and floods that washed away what few possessions they managed to cling to in flight. The stagnant water and lack of sanitation created a breeding ground for infectious diseases that threaten the health of children already weakened by a lack of food and harsh living conditions.

IOCC, in cooperation with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission, is responding with efforts to stem the spread of disease. Newly constructed

communal latrines provide privacy and more sanitary facilities for 720 families from both the refugee camp and the host communities in Leitchuor.

Another 300 refugee families will soon have access to similar facilities under construction in the Kule camp. The distribution of soap, water storage cans and new blankets bring an added measure of comfort to 4,000 families with malnourished children and people living with HIV/AIDS at Tierkidi camp in Ethiopia's Gambela region.

IOCC, an ACT Alliance member,



Christof Krackhard/ACT Alliance

is also addressing the need to ease the emotional trauma facing the vulnerable refugees. Crisis counseling for 1,000 refugee children, women, and elderly helps each uprooted person develop the skills needed to cope with the daily stress of refugee life and the uncertainty of what their future holds.

## BALKANS FLOOD RELIEF FOCUSES ON SCHOOL CHILDREN



Nikola Čulić/IOCC

The 2014 school year was cut short for thousands of children living in the Balkans when catastrophic floods submerged Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina last May. The small northern Bosnia town of Šamac was among the hardest hit communities. The raging waters not only damaged 3,000 homes,

businesses, and the town's sole primary and secondary schools, but also swept away desks, books, computers and lab equipment from the classrooms. Schooling came to a standstill for the town's 900 students.

Through your support, IOCC has helped restore the learning environment for the community's schoolchildren. Replacement desks, blackboards and teaching materials now fill the classrooms at Šamac Primary School, along with the excited voices of young children like second-graders, Mirjana

and Luka, eager to learn and to play with schoolmates again.

At nearby Nikola Tesla High School, future chemists and pharmacists can pursue their studies in the newly equipped chemistry lab. "The children and their families in this community have suffered great losses from the floods," said Principal Milivoje Dzombic. "The restoration of the school, and especially the lab, also restores the morale in these high school students and gives them the will to continue their education."

In addition to equipping the schools in Šamac, IOCC also distributed school kits to more than 15,000 vulnerable children living in Bosnia's flood affected communities.

# Being Christ to our Neighbor

On the Sunday of the Last Judgment during Great Lent, the Gospel (Matthew 25:31-46) reminds us that when the Son of Man comes with his angels to gather the nations, He will separate mankind into two groups, those on His right who are to inherit the Kingdom and those on His left who “will go away into ever lasting punishment.” And the criterion for how we are to be judged, whether we will find ourselves on the right or on the left, is what we have done to our neighbor.

**“And the King will answer and say to them,  
‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch  
as you did it to one of the least of these  
My brethren, you did it to Me.’”**

In the Gospel of Luke we are given the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The crime of the rich man was that he did not even see Lazarus, poor, hungry and full of sores lying outside his door. He lived his life as though Lazarus did not even exist.

Our modern world is full of men and women who are Lazarus. They lay, so to speak, outside our doors in places like the Middle East and Africa.

St. Silouan of Mt. Athos, it is said, often repeated these words: “Our brother is our life.” He understood his brother and neighbor to be a very concrete, animate icon of God Himself. So much so that the existence of every human person, made in the image and likeness of God, is somehow “included” in Christ’s own personal existence, Christ having taken upon Himself the whole Adam, all of what is human when



He wrapped Himself up in Adam’s bruised, broken and dying flesh. And so to serve our neighbor is to serve Christ Himself. In light of the Last Judgment, we might then recast the words of St. Silouan this way: Our brother is our salvation. Our brother, our neighbor is also our opportunity to save ourselves.

Archbishop Benjamin  
*Orthodox Church in America  
Diocese of San Francisco*

## Volunteer for an IOCC Orthodox Action Team

Join the over 700 volunteers who have already helped rebuild lives across the US.

Sign up to participate on an IOCC Orthodox Action Team. Become God’s hands in service to your fellow man.

[iocc.org/actionteam](http://iocc.org/actionteam)



## HYGIENE KITS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED



Please encourage your parish to help families in need by assembling IOCC Hygiene Kits. Instructions are available at [iocc.org/kits](http://iocc.org/kits).