



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

FOCUS ON CHILDREN

VOLUME 3, NO. 3 WINTER 2000

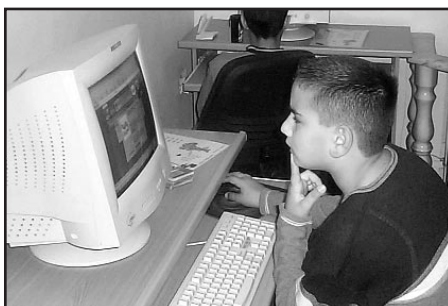
## The Voice of Children

By Lee Papouras, IOCC-Jerusalem

Children online at the Al-Balad Center run in cooperation with the Arab Orthodox Society in Jerusalem use the Internet to express their feelings about the situation in the Middle East.

**Jerusalem (IOCC)** — For children in the Middle East, daily life is consumed with fear and uncertainty about the violence that swirls around them. "It's really going bad these days, but the computer may help. Through the Internet we have the opportunity to spread our voices through the world," explains Rawan, a participant in an IOCC project to provide computer and Internet training to youth in East Jerusalem.

In August, when IOCC first initiated the "Al-Balad" computer and Internet training project, the goal was to provide an opportunity for children in the Old City of Jerusalem to access computers and learn how to use them. The skills they gained from the project would help to prepare them to enter a job market that is one of the most



"It's really going bad these days, but the computer may help," said a young participant in the IOCC Youth Internet and Computer Training Program.

technologically advanced in the

world. This primary objective was achieved from the outset and the project site not only became a center for education, but also a place for the exchange of ideas among the youth.

What began as a training project in the relative calm of the summer has become an opportunity for children caught in the violence of the Middle East to express their fear and doubt, hopes and aspirations.

"We hid in the toilets and then under the beds," admitted George, Edward and David, three brothers ranging in age from 12 to 14, when IOCC's Country Representative Nora Kort visited them recently. While they were ashamed to speak about the fear they feel every evening when darkness covers the West Bank and the cycle of violence is renewed, their voices speak for dozens of other children Kort spoke to as she tries to keep on top of the growing needs faced by children, the elderly and others who have been made vulnerable by the violence.

"I am Palestinian and I am going through lots of difficulties nowadays, I get into a lot of political discussions



Photos: Lee Papouras, IOCC-Jerusalem

through which I can express my feelings and the situation that we're in, our point of view of what is happening in Palestine and how we see the future of the land," explained Tamara, who also frequents the Al-Balad Internet Center.

While others have chosen violence, the children of the Old City, confined in their stone fortress, have found a resource more powerful than all the stones of the eastern desert and instead of violence use the Internet to communicate their feelings with people near and far. Through web pages, e-mail correspondence and chat rooms the children visit the Al-Balad Center which is run in cooperation with the Arab Orthodox Society in Jerusalem.

This Project has given youth strength and a tool to share their experiences in hopes of bringing an end to the violence. "For me it is a pool of communication which connects me to the world..." wrote a young girl from Jerusalem.

And thus will they teach the world that knowledge is truth, and truth light.

*Editor's Note: Lee Papouras, an IOCC intern in Jerusalem, wrote this story based on e-mail correspondence with children at the Al-Balad Internet Center in Jerusalem.*



# From the Executive Director



**The Icon of The Nativity of Our Lord (1348)**  
Decani Monastery, Kosovo-Metohija

During the Nativity Season, when we wait in anticipation of the birth of the Christ Child, the images of a family with no place to stay, a mother about to give birth and a child in need of the loving care emphasizes the call to respond to the needs of young people around the world.

This newsletter features some of the work that IOCC is doing to share the warmth and love of the holiday season with children and their families throughout the year.

According to the United Nations, while young people are beginning to participate in the leadership of their countries in the newly emerging economies of Central and Eastern Europe, thousands more are being left behind. The number of drug-addicted street children,

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC) was established in 1992 by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) as the official humanitarian aid agency of Orthodox Christians to work in cooperation with the Orthodox Churches worldwide.

*The mission of IOCC is to respond to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ, to minister to those who are suffering and are in need throughout the world, sharing with them God's gifts of food, shelter, economic self-sufficiency and hope.*

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News & Needs is edited by Mark Hodde and Kosara Gavrilovic.**

young prostitutes, long-term unemployed and those who are HIV-positive are growing. In India and Africa, where IOCC is beginning programs, entrenched poverty and natural disasters affect millions more children.

While worldwide efforts are being made to protect children, millions still live in conflict zones and are the main victims of such conflict. Over the last decade, more than 2 million children have died as a result of war and some 15 million children have been displaced within their countries or made refugees.

While IOCC works to address the challenges faced by children around the world, children in more fortunate circumstances are also responding through IOCC as never before. In Canada, a teen youth group raised over \$2000 to help children in Jerusalem, in Baltimore a Sunday School collects offerings to help other children through Advent, and in Connecticut a youth group planted mustard seeds as a way of raising awareness within their parish of small acts of generosity which bring about enormous differences for those in need.

As we celebrate Christ's birth, we also remember Christ's poor—especially the children—whom IOCC works to help each day.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Constantine M. Triantafilou



Photo: Panayiotis Sakellariou



# The Neglected Children of Calcutta



Photo: Panayiotis Sakellariou

**Baltimore (IOCC)** — During British colonial times Calcutta was the cultural capital and the throbbing heart of the vast Indian subcontinent. Today it is a teeming backwater with desperate and troubling poverty. The economy has been plagued by persistent labor unrest, industrial production has declined—in fact, there are no significant industries and tourism is non-existent.

The neglected city of Calcutta is densely populated and heavily polluted. No longer do those wishing to escape the regular floods of the countryside flock to it—even though more than one hundred square miles of countryside were submerged by the summer's monsoon flood waters when IOCC Representative Alexis Troubetzkoy visited to see the work being done by the Philanthropic Society of the Orthodox Church in Calcutta under the guidance of His Eminence, Metropolitan Nikitas of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia.

Nowhere is the desperation of

Calcutta's people more apparent than in one of her worst slums located a few blocks away from the Greek Orthodox Church in the Kalighat area.

"Hell on earth is equivalent to Calcutta," said Metropolitan Nikitas of the situation.

In the midst of such dire conditions, 48-year-old Father Ignatios, a monk from Stavronikita Monastery on Mt. Athos, has been working since 1991 to serve the poor who visit the Church's doorstep each day. Each morning over 200 children come to the church to receive a cup of enriched milk and three biscuits—for many the only meal of the day.

At the invitation of Metropolitan Nikitas, a long-time advocate of the IOCC's ministry, IOCC will begin a project in Calcutta in support of the on-going work being done by Fr. Ignatios and the dedicated staff of the Philanthropic Society.

The IOCC project will provide training in basic health care for the six priests and three deacons who

work with Fr. Ignatios and provide care at the Church and in the surrounding villages. The project will also provide computer-based training for young girls at an orphanage owned and operated by the Philanthropic Society.

"We are giving them the opportunity to break the cycle of poor education and poverty," said Panayiotis Pete Sakellariou, the children's volunteer English language teacher.

In addition to the training opportunities, IOCC will also provide food for 150 children at two orphanages—the one owned by the Metropolitanate and another it operates outside of Calcutta. Food distributions are scheduled to span over a three-month period.

"According to the Gospel we are to reach out to the poor, this is why we are here," explained Metropolitan Nikitas, "to serve the spiritual, social and humanitarian needs of Christ's poor."

*Alexis Troubetzkoy contributed to this article.*



Photo: Panayiotis Sakellariou

Metropolitan Nikitas and Sr. Nektaria with girls who reside at an orphanage run by the Philanthropic Society of the Greek Orthodox Church in India.

# The Last Resort

By Darejan Dzotsenidze, IOCC - Tbilisi

“Home is the place where,  
when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in.”

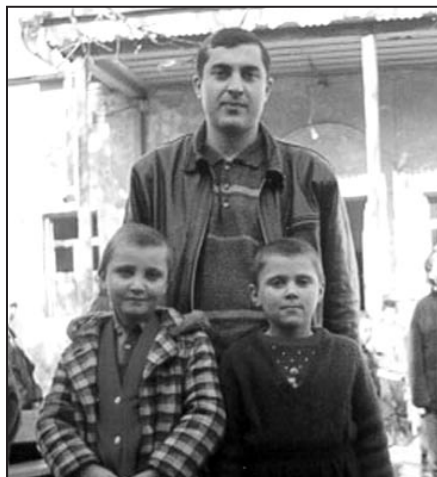
*Robert Frost*

## Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia

**(IOCC)** - The homes provided by state-run institutions in the Republic of Georgia are often the last stop for children in despair.

Children like Natasha and Svetlana, ages 10 and 11.

The Akhaltsikhe Boarding School, a home for mentally retarded children in the southern Georgian city of the same name, has problems with electricity, heating and water supply. There are no showers or baths for children. From time to time the staff bring water in pails, heat the water one bucket at a time and, with great difficulty, bathe the children. There are no washing



Kaha Legashvili of IOCC's partner organization "Lazarus" visits with Natasha and Svetlana, ages 11 and 10. The school was the last place where their mother could find food and shelter for the girls.



Photo: IOCC-Tbilisi

Children at the State-run Akhaltsikhe Boarding School for the Mentally Retarded eat in shifts because there aren't enough dishes. IOCC has been providing food for the children and institutions in the Republic of Georgia like this one since 1995.

machines in the School. Everything is washed by hand.

Natasha and Svetlana's heads, shaven to prevent the spread of lice, bear witness to the difficult conditions. Despite the amenities it lacks, however, the school is a godsend for the sisters.

The girls do not have a father. They used to live with their mother in their grandfather's house in Akhaltsikhe. Five years ago their grandfather threw them out and, as a last resort, their mother had to leave them at the Boarding School for mentally retarded children even though they are not. Natasha's and Svetlana's mother is unemployed and lives in the streets of Akhaltsikhe. At the Boarding School, the children are at least provided with shelter and food.

IOCC has been providing food assistance to institutions in the Republic of Georgia, including the

Akhaltsikhe boarding school, since 1995. The school is home for 106 children who take turns eating the food provided by IOCC because they do not have enough dishes.

Shortage is a word that modifies most of the resources the school has to care for the children. Children are short of clothes and bedding.

The building is in bad need of renovation, the roof is leaking; many windows are broken and in need of repair. The teachers have not received their salaries for months.

Given the economic crisis in the Republic of Georgia and the Georgian Government's inability to provide any assistance to such institutions as Akhaltsikhe Boarding School for Mentally Retarded Children, it is not difficult to imagine what would happen to these children if it were not for the food assistance provided by IOCC.



# Simple Pleasures

By Nenad Prelevic, IOCC - Podgorica

**Podgorica (IOCC)** - "When I grow up, I am going to be a doctor, then I will heal Mladen," declared five-year-old Milena who shared with me her longing to help her physically disabled three-year-old brother as well as other thoughts during a recent visit.

Milena, born in the small village of Lukin Fir near Andrijevica in a remote section of northern Montenegro, is one of nine children born to a very poor family. Her parents, who used to work in a leather tannery, lost their jobs in 1996. As a result of economic sanctions imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which restricted imports and exports like leather goods, the factory was closed and her parents haven't been able to find work since.

Milena, her five brothers, three sisters and parents, share a house barely 270 square feet in size—an area measuring the equivalent of just 16 by 17 feet. The house, which used to belong to her grandparents, is very old and run down. All of their possessions—three beds, one wooden stove, one carpet, a table with a few chairs and an old dresser—fill the

tiny space. Two years ago Milena's family began building an addition to the home that is equal in size to the main house. With their limited means they have only been able to build a part of the walls.

Each day, Milena's six older siblings walk over three miles one-way to attend primary school. Many of them walked barefoot to reach school and did not have the supplies they needed. With the support of the Group 7-Vlade Divac Children's Foundation, Milena and her brothers and sisters received school kits from IOCC. The kits, packaged in backpacks, contained basic school supplies, a pair of shoes and—much to the children's delight—t-shirts from the Group 7 Foundation signed by some of the basketball stars who began the Foundation.

In addition to the school kits, with the assistance of the Circle of Serbian Sisters IOCC has provided food and hygiene articles to assist Milena's family.

As her aspiration to become a doctor conveys, Milena looks forward with excitement to beginning

kindergarten herself next fall.

While she dreams of one day becoming a doctor, when asked what she hopes for, Milena modestly described the house she wishes for, complete "with five rooms and enough beds for each of us. The house should be full of fancy dishware and rooms full of toys. I would like to have shoes with shoelaces and one red skirt with buttons. I would like to have one cow, to milk her and to have enough milk for all of us."

As we left, Milena continued her usual day, helping her mother with house chores and taking care of her younger sister Jasna.

In parting, I had one more question and asked Milena what she likes the most? The five-year-old girl replied, "Whenever I have the chance, I like to eat meat."

For Milena and her family and the 100,000 people served by IOCC in Montenegro, the assistance provided is more than a parcel of food or a bag of school supplies, it is the opportunity to look forward to the future with hope.



Milena looks on as Sonja Krivcevic of the Circle of Serbian Sisters in Berane, Montenegro visits with her youngest sibling, Jasna.

Milena, who one day hopes to become a doctor so that she can help her disabled brother, lives in a one room house with eight brothers and sisters and her parents.





# The Only Refuge

By Nicholas Chakos, IOCC - Bucharest

Photo courtesy of the Victor Babes Hospital



A young resident of the Victor Babes hospital in Bucharest receives his daily medication. Suffering from AIDS, the boy was abandoned by his family and has no one to take care of him other than the hospital staff and ROC chaplains who visit him regularly.

**Bucharest (IOCC)** - Early one morning as he was walking down a Bucharest street, Fr. Victorin heard a muffled cry coming from behind a garbage dumpster. Fr. Victorin went to investigate and amidst piles of rotting trash found a shivering infant—not more than a few hours old.

Tragic though it was to find a baby in such a state, Fr. Victorin knelt down and thanked God because he knew that other babies were not so fortunate. Many babies in Bucharest are abandoned by their mothers and left to die in the numerous alleyways and trash receptacles

Every day, Fr. Victorin, chaplain at Victor Babes Hospital, visits patients suffering from a variety of devastating illnesses, such as meningitis, tuberculosis and AIDS. "It's an extremely difficult assignment," says Fr. Victorin. "But for many patients, the chaplain is the last refuge for counseling and support."

Many of Fr. Victorin's patients are children infected with the HIV virus. According to the Romanian Ministry of

Health, there are approximately 15,000 Romanians infected with HIV/AIDS of which a staggering 6,600 are children, making Romania home to the largest number of pediatric AIDS cases in Europe. Many of these children are abandoned and live in hospitals or orphanages.

AIDS remains a taboo subject in Romanian society. Treated as pariahs, HIV patients receive very little support from society. Although various government agencies offer limited support to HIV infected persons, the Romanian government has yet to pass any legislation concerning assistance for HIV/AIDS children or adults.

Because of the paucity of services provided by the government and because of the stigma associated with AIDS, many HIV infected people turn to the Church for hope and assistance. The Romanian Orthodox Church maintains a national medical network of 320 hospital chaplains, medical doctors and medical assistants who offer treatment in hospitals—or at home—using methods targeting mental and spiritual wellness in addition to proven medical techniques. This network collaborates closely with existing healthcare institutions providing crucial supplemental care and counseling services to those who request it.

"We provide services free of charge and without regard to race or religious affiliation," states Fr. Ciprian Spyridon, Director of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) Department for Church and Society and the person responsible for managing the national medical outreach network. "We have staff in every

village, town and county of Romania, but we are overwhelmed by the need. Care and counseling for AIDS patients, especially children, is our priority, but the number of patients is rapidly increasing making it difficult to provide the care they need."

In conjunction with the ROC, IOCC has developed a program to provide training in care and counseling techniques for the Church's medical network that will increase its capability to deal with persons suffering from AIDS and other terminal diseases. The program will emphasize the training for the care of pediatric AIDS cases.

"With the training provided through this program, Church chaplains and medical personnel will make a significant contribution to healthcare throughout Romania," states Nicholas Chakos, IOCC Program Coordinator for Romania. Participants will attend three intensive training courses and will receive reference manuals to help them in their fieldwork. In addition, training in preventive measures will enable the caregivers to hold AIDS awareness seminars in their respective villages and towns.

While they work to prevent more people from suffering, for those who have already been infected, the program will ensure that they are not alone.

A nurse holds an infant who was left on the doorstep of a Church-run home for abandoned children. Children like this one—many of whom are infected with HIV—will receive care through an IOCC program in cooperation with the Romanian Orthodox Church.



Photo courtesy of the Romanian Orthodox Church

# Longing to Learn

By Milena Kukolj, IOCC - Banja Luka

**Banja Luka (IOCC)** - "Sometimes I think I know more than my teacher," explains 12-year-old Nikolina about her instructor who is trying to cover for the shortage of teachers in this Bosnian village. "English is one of my favorite subjects and it's been great since we got a certified English teacher ten days ago. Now we are all satisfied and our previous teacher doesn't have to teach a subject he's not qualified for."

Krnjeusa village, where Nikolina lives, is recognized as one of the most successful areas for the return of displaced persons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since early 1998, IOCC and other international agencies have combined efforts to rebuild the community and to support returning families through housing reconstruction, infrastructure repairs, electricity and water reconnection and agriculture support. While 80% of the villagers have been successfully resettled, normal conditions remain a distant dream—especially for the youth.

Nikolina, who is still in primary school, is one of the lucky ones.



Mirjana, Bozana and Branka (from left) - looking forward for better future.

Photo - IOCC Banja Luka

Young people of high school age have nowhere to go in Krnjeusa. Teenagers must travel to provincial towns to ethnically integrated high schools about which parents still feel uneasy.

The children living in Krnjeusa are happy to be home again, but they still face many difficulties. The only elementary school in Krnjeusa serves about 25 children and the lack of teachers is an obstacle to quality education. The school's three teachers have divided the children into two groups—one for seven to ten year olds, the other for children between 10 and 14 years of age. The mathematics teacher also teaches art, music, and history. Until recently, a mechanical engineer was teaching English.

Secondary schools in neighboring towns do not offer general education but are limited to special technical subjects like mechanics, electronics or forestry which further restrict professional choices of the young people. Those fortunate enough to attend high school prefer to study in the capital city, Banja Luka, 100 miles from their homes.

Fourteen-year-old Mirjana is enrolled in a long-distance learning program. She lives in Krnjeusa, studies by herself and travels to Banja Luka every two months to take exams. She seems happy with this arrangement. "I have an opportunity to visit the city and catch up on things we all miss here—at least every two months. And, I know I will continue with normal schooling next year. We have some relatives in Banja Luka who promised to provide me with accommodation. I will spend this year trying to learn as much as possible and to obtain



Photo - IOCC Banja Luka

Milena Kukolj, IOCC/Banja Luka Office Manager plays with children during a visit to Krnjeusa. Since early 1998, IOCC has helped to rebuild the local community and to support returning families through housing reconstruction, infrastructure repairs, electricity and water reconnection and agriculture support.

the best grades," she says.

While Mirjana shares her happiness, two other teenagers, Branka and Bozana try to avoid the topic. They don't have the opportunity to continue schooling this year. Bozana finished elementary school last June. Her family tried to register her for a long-distance learning program, but don't have relatives or friends in Banja Luka to help them. "I have to wait until next year. My dad and uncle have promised they will do everything. I know that it will be very difficult, and only God knows what will happen in the end. But, I still have hope," says Bozana. Branka remains silent. She smiles and pays attention to a 2-year old boy avoiding our questions.

While IOCC has helped to provide the basics: a house, food, and opportunities for families to make a small income, community building efforts and youth programs are required to complete the process and turn the reconstructed houses back into the homes they once were.



# Year-End Giving Reminder



If you are counting on extra tax savings next April, keep International Orthodox Christian

Charities (IOCC) in mind for your charitable contribution before year-end. Be sure to have your year-end cash gift post-marked or year-end stock gift transferred no later than midnight, December 31, 2000. Alternately, you may give online at [www.iocc.org](http://www.iocc.org). Contributions received online before midnight

December 31 Eastern Standard Time are tax-deductible for 2000. If you need assistance in transferring stock or mutual funds, contact IOCC toll-free at (877) 803 IOCC (4622) for details.

There are many giving options from which to choose and we would be happy to help you find the option that best fits your needs. You may want to consider a memorial gift this year to honor someone special at Christmas or you may be thinking about a special gift to help IOCC meet the needs of children around the world who are the focus of this newsletter.



## NEW ADDRESS

IOCC has moved its headquarters to a new office. Our new address is:

**IOCC**  
**110 West Road, Suite 360**  
**Baltimore, MD 21204 USA**

IOCC experienced a loss in telephone service after relocating its offices. The number is back in service and remains (410) 243-9820, Fax: (410) 243-9824.

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