



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

HELPING OTHERS HELP THEMSELVES

VOLUME 11, NO. 3 WINTER 2008

## KOSOVO: AT THE END OF THE ROAD, HOPE IS RENEWED

**Belgrade, Serbia (IOCC)** —

Turning off of the modern, four-lane highway that leads to southern Serbia, our convoy of vehicles makes its way to the border between Serbia and Kosovo.

We pass through the bustling town of Kosovska Mitrovica and are allowed by international security forces to cross the bridge that divides the Serbian and Albanian communities. The road narrows as we traverse once productive farm land that lies fallow. Finally, the road becomes a single lane as we approach the village of Banje and end in a dirt path in front of an elementary school.

We are literally at the end of the road, isolated in a remote corner of Kosovo. Yet, we are surrounded by dozens of excited children, their parents and teachers.

For two days in September, His Grace Bishop Teodosije of Lipljan hosted IOCC Executive Director Constantine M. Triantafilou and basketball stars Vlade Divac and Dragan Tarlac. They visited children in Kosovo and brought with them shirts, hats and basketballs donated by Adidas through the Peja Stojakovic Children's Foundation.

The sports stars sat down among the children to ask them about the subjects they were studying. The elementary school in Banje has a computer center and generator through a project implemented by IOCC with the support of Divac. "The positive thinking that they display in fac-

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Serb basketball stars Vlade Divac and Dragan Tarlac visited school children in Kosovo on a trip hosted by His Grace Bishop Teodosije of Lipljan and IOCC.

ing the challenges in Kosovo always makes me happy," reflected Tarlac, who has visited Kosovo numerous times over the years.

IOCC has focused on community infrastructure projects in the region, such as the rehabilitation of schools that allow people to remain in their homes and avoid being displaced to nearby Serbia. More than 200,000 others from Kosovo have left in search of security and stability since 1999.

Recently, IOCC announced an initiative to provide \$500,000 in

assistance to Kosovo for the expansion of agricultural projects that provide employment and foster inter-ethnic cooperation. The initiative will also provide assistance to schools and create educational and recreational programs.

"It is amazing to see the smiles of the children who are living under such difficult circumstances," said Divac. "The work that is being done by Bishop Teodosije and IOCC is critical for the survival of these people."

— Mark Hodde/IOCC Baltimore

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Shota and his wife Medea were proud of the life they had built in South Ossetia. "We produced the best apples in Georgia," said Shota, an elderly man who has to use a cane. Medea was proud of their orchards, their two-story farmhouse, their family heirlooms. On August 7, their world came to an end when Georgian and Russian forces engaged in a conflict that would eventually displace more than 160,000 individuals. Today, the couple has taken refuge in a kindergarten in the city of Gori and their sole possession now is Shota's cane.

Displacement is a recurring theme in this issue of *News & Needs*. You'll read about more families in Georgia coping with all that they've lost as well as the challenges of the coming winter. A new grant enables IOCC to provide winter supplies such as heating, bedding, fuel for cooking, and warm clothing to 2,000 individuals like Shota and Medea.

In Syria, IOCC expands its Iraqi refugee program. More than 62,000 Iraqi refugees and disadvantaged Syrians will benefit from new supplies, schooling, and vocational training. And in Iraq, where families continually face the threat of being displaced, more

aid from IOCC to help combat malnutrition, a major problem for Iraqi children. You'll also read about IOCC's project to provide greater safety and training to Peloponnese fire fighters. Greece's southern region, known for its hot and dry summers, continues to face the threat of wildfires.

Finally, our cover story focuses on Kosovo and how families are bravely working to keep from being displaced. His Grace Bishop Teodosije of Lipljan hosted basketball stars Dragan Tarlac, Vlade Divac and I on a two-day tour in September that took us to communities where IOCC has provided repair and building projects for schools and community centers.

I will never forget the amazed looks of the children and the way they strained their necks to get an eyeful of these basketball giants who came to be with them, to understand their world, and to leave behind gifts of basketballs, t-shirts and hats.

In the relative comfort of our lives in North America, we may never experience the loss that Medea and Shota have sustained or the vulnerability of a child in Kosovo. I invite you now to enter their world and to come alongside them.



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Yours In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou  
Executive Director & CEO

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 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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## IOCC PROVIDES NEW EQUIPMENT FOR GREECE'S FIRE FIGHTERS



D. Djukic/IOCC Greece



Nikos Nikolakopoulos, a fire fighter of Pyrgos, Greece, lost three colleagues to the wildfires of 2007. Through a \$118,000 grant from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, IOCC will provide fire shelters to the Pyrgos Fire Department for increased protection from entrapment situations such as those that claimed the lives of the firemen.

**Peloponnese, Greece** — Nikos Nikolakopoulos has been a fire fighter in Pyrgos, Greece for the last 22 years. “To be a fire fighter,” he says very simply, “you have to like action and you cannot be afraid of fire.” Pyrgos is located in Greece’s southern Peloponnese region, which suffered the loss of tens of thousands of acres and livestock to last year’s wildfires, widely considered to be Greece’s worst fires in 100 years.

The wildfires also claimed 61 lives, three of which were members of the Pyrgos Fire Department. All three fire fighters were colleagues of Nikolakopoulos and one was a close friend.

Nikolakopoulos was among the first who reached the site of the

tragedy. The fire fighters perished when they were choked by the heavy smoke, even though the fire was blown away in a few minutes by strong winds. Nikolakopoulos believes that his three colleagues would still be alive today had they been equipped with fire shelters, the coverings that provide protection from radiant and convective heat and are used in entrapment situations.

Through a new \$118,000 grant from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, IOCC is helping the Fire Department of Pyrgos improve fire fighters’ safety and enhance their ability to effectively combat wildfires by providing 255 fire shelters and

training its fire fighters on how to use the equipment.

IOCC has been developing innovative ways of assisting Greece’s Peloponnese region to combat wildfires during its dry, hot summers. Since 2007, it has assisted thousands of Peloponnese farmers with 3,100 tons of animal feed as well as 60 tons of seed to replant grasslands.

The Peloponnese was struck again by wildfires in 2008 but they didn’t have the intensity or range of the 2007 fires. With its high temperatures and sparse rain from April to November, wildfires will continue to be a challenge for the Peloponnese.

— Dimitri Djukic/IOCC Greece

## GEORGIA: DISPLACED FAMILIES FACE HARSH WINTER



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Families who fled the fighting in South Ossetia last August face a harsh winter. A new grant allows IOCC to help 2,000 individuals with stoves, fuel for cooking and heating, bedding, winter clothes, and cooking supplies.

**Tskvarichamia, Georgia** — The leaves have already changed in Tskvarichamia, a mountain hamlet about 15 miles from Tbilisi. For the 16 families taking shelter in a modest building, this is not a herald of the harvest, but rather, an ominous reminder that winter is coming and they are not prepared.

At dusk, two mothers and their children sit on the front porch and explain to an aid worker that the rest of the families have gone to the authorities to protest their living conditions. "We feel cut off up here," says Nanna, carrying her small son on her lap. "It is cold and we cannot properly care for our children." She and her husband were farmers in South Ossetia, and like many who were displaced by last summer's fighting between Russian and Georgian forces, they fled with little more than the clothes on their backs.

The group that had gone to Tbilisi return, and seeing the visitor immediately launch into a litany of complaints. They have

no kitchen utensils. Blankets were delivered but the mattresses are no good. Above all, the building was formerly used as a summer camp for children and there is not enough insulation from the cold.

Inside the building, there is a strong smell from toilets that are backed up. In the hallway, there is a list of government phone numbers such as "how to find a missing relative." The group moves

from room to room eager to show the aid worker mattresses atop rusty springs and thin blankets that were delivered in August. Some speculate about their neighbors, Ossetians who fled to Russia. They believe that those families got an offer to go back to South Ossetia where Georgians can no longer return.

IOCC has been providing continuous assistance since early August to thousands of displaced people in Georgia as well as to those who chose to flee to Russia. Through a new \$200,000 grant by the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), IOCC is helping 2,000 individuals get through the winter by providing stoves, fuel for cooking, bedding, and winter clothes. IOCC is cooperating with the Georgian Orthodox Church to assist families in 20 displacement centers in and around Tbilisi, including the families of Tskvarichamia.

These families want to return to their villages in South Ossetia, a hope that is fading as the months pass on. "The hardest feeling," says Elsa, a mother of two, "is to not know what has happened to everything that we built and worked for."



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# LEBANESE SUMMER CAMPS STRENGTHEN SENSE OF BELONGING



M. Joulayyan/IOCC Lebanon

More than 400 Lebanese students participated in IOCC's summer camps which emphasized community service, diversity and tolerance.

**Beirut, Lebanon** — IOCC hosted 14 summer camps this year throughout Lebanon, promoting a culture of tolerance between youth and encouraging them to take an active role in improving their communities.

Hussein, an 18-year-old who participated in a Baalbek summer camp, is already anxious to start a development organization where people from all religions can work together to help Lebanon's rural areas. "The first day, we were strangers meeting for the first time," says Hussein, "but I was relieved to find out that although we came from various backgrounds there was nothing standing in the way of our unity."

Such youth camps serve an important role in Lebanon, a country with a long history of

sectarian conflict and whose parliament recognizes 18 religious and ethnic sects.

More than 400 teenagers participated in four-day camps that featured community service projects and lectures on strategic planning and citizenship. Participants interviewed residents to learn about their community's needs and then went to work cleaning streets, planting trees, and painting school playgrounds. They also learned how to write a proposal, monitor their project and write an evaluation of what was accomplished.

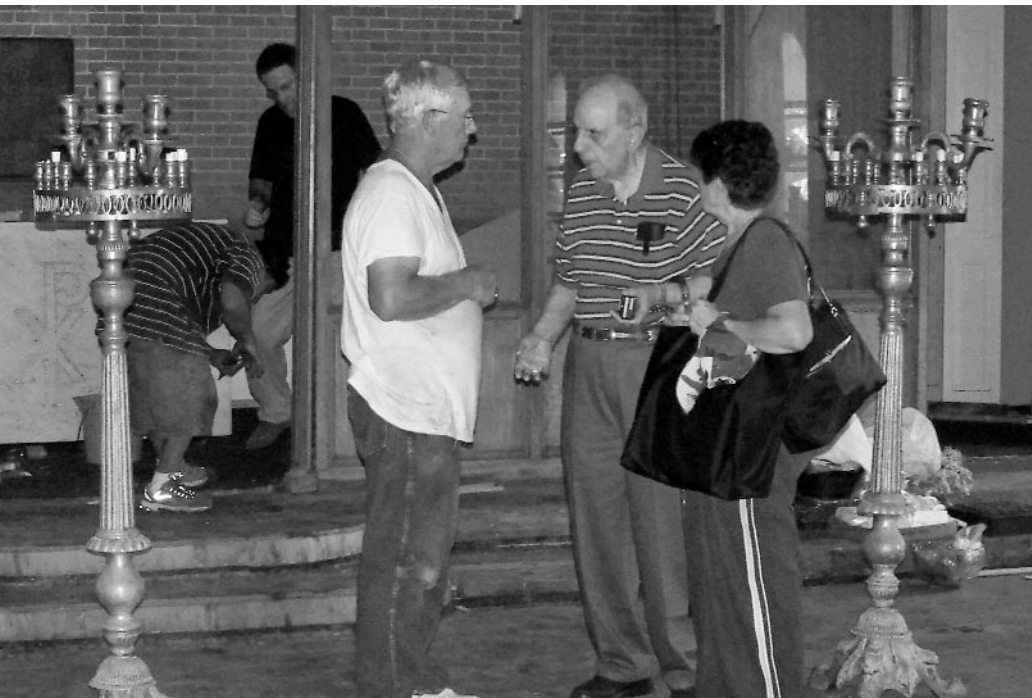
Wala, 19-years-old, learned that one can better identify and prioritize a community's needs with the participation of that community. "Those are skills that we'll use in our life and not only for summer

camp," says Wala. She adds that the most interesting aspects of summer camp were the time spent getting introduced to the region, making direct contact with villagers and listening to their problems and stories.

IOCC's 2008 summer camps are part of the \$4.7 million Lebanon Education Assistance for Development (LEAD) program by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The program aims to improve the learning environment and academic performance of students in 213 public schools in Lebanon. The summer camps were implemented by IOCC in partnership with the University of Balamand and the Lebanese Ministry of Education.

— Maral Joulayyan/IOCC Lebanon

## LETTERS FROM THE FRONTLINE



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Tony Speakman confers with members of Assumption as cleaning and repairs of the church get underway. IOCC responded to Hurricane Ike with trauma counseling and emergency supplies.

**Galveston, Texas** — Tony Speakman's home is in shambles. As owner of the Speakman Construction Company, he estimates he has lost \$60,000 worth of building materials. It all matters little to Tony Speakman though. He has other priorities, energy to devote elsewhere. Speakman, who lives just outside Galveston, is determined to rebuild his church —

singlehandedly, if necessary.

Hurricane Ike leveled Galveston during the early morning hours of September 13. Included in Ike's destructive path was the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church, unprotected and uninsured from the raging Gulf waters.

"Seeing the church destroyed hit me pretty hard," said Speakman,

who serves on the church's parish council. I met Speakman when I went down with a group of volunteers from IOCC known as the Frontline. IOCC responded to Hurricane Ike with trauma counseling and by delivering a shipment of medical and hygiene supplies to American Red Cross shelters.

Speakman plans on rebuilding Assumption, no matter the cost to his own business. Currently, he has a crew of 12 working on the church. He says the church can be rebuilt by next spring but estimates the cost will be between \$1.25 - \$1.5 million. He does not know exactly where the financial support will come from, but he is prepared to dig deep into his own pockets.

Assumption's membership is approximately 90 families, 40 of which are active. Nearly all its members have some level of insurance coverage, according to Speakman. The church, however, did not have the necessary coverage.

"Several families have been totally wiped out," Speakman said. "Even those who were not have been hit pretty hard and have sustained some level of damage. They're all just trying to get their lives back in order and are trying to clean up their own homes."

— Father Marc Vranes, IOCC Frontline



C. Spagnoli

## IOCC DELIVERS \$2.2 MILLION IN MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO ZIMBABWE

**Mutoko, Zimbabwe** — IOCC recently delivered three shipments of medical supplies, pharmaceuticals and over-the-counter drugs to the Luisa Guidotti Hospital in Mutoko, Zimbabwe. The shipments, worth a total of \$2.2 million, included bath equipment for the disabled, dentist stools, walkers, cervical traction devices, antibiotics, and a number of pharmaceuticals that treat high blood pressure and infections. The pharmaceuticals are also being used by Park Town Clinic in Harare which is supported by the Orthodox Church of Zimbabwe. The shipments were supplied by Medical Teams International (MTI) and Brother's Brother Foundation (BBF). The Robert Bazzoni Onlus Foundation and IOCC paid the acquisition and shipping costs. Since 2006, IOCC has delivered a total of seven medical shipments worth nearly \$5 million to Zimbabwe's beleaguered hospitals.



## HOPE FOR A FUTURE IN SYRIA

**Damascus, Syria** — The fear of being kidnapped drove Rana (right) and her family from Baghdad in 2005 to the safety of Damascus, Syria. But life in Damascus as a refugee with no education and no hope for work is almost as difficult as war in Iraq. Since 2007, IOCC has provided educational services and emergency supplies to Iraqi refugees living in Syria as well as to disadvantaged Syrians. Rana had been refused admission to Syria's public schools because she had no certificate to prove that she had been a student, a common problem for refugees. With her tuition paid for by IOCC, Rana is now a student at the Horizon Institute in central Damascus where she takes English and computer classes. IOCC recently received two new grants from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration (BPRM). A grant worth \$1.8 million will allow IOCC to continue to provide vocational training for 800 young people in such areas as hair-styling, car repair, cell phone repair, sewing and computer skills. The second contract, worth \$2 million, will benefit nearly 62,000 Iraqi refugees and disadvantaged Syrians with tuition, school and hygiene kits, teaching materials, summer courses, and vocational training.



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## HELPING FAMILIES IN BAGHDAD'S SADR CITY



IOCC Iraq

**Baghdad, Iraq** — IOCC recently provided food and emergency supplies to vulnerable families living in Sadr City, one of the poorest and most densely populated districts of Baghdad and the site of continuous heavy fighting between insurgents and multi-

national forces. Through a \$400,000 grant, awarded to IOCC by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), about 2,400 vulnerable individuals received high protein foods as well as hygiene supplies for at least three months.

One in four children under five years of age in Iraq is chronically malnourished. The residents of Sadr City who benefitted from the distribution include low income families, single-headed households, orphans, the elderly, invalids, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). "The effects of war and the general economic slow-down exacerbated by 12 years of economic sanctions have adversely affected Iraq's food security," says George Antoun, IOCC's Regional Director. More than 60% of Iraqi families are entirely dependent on the government's food ration program, however, the Iraqi government has announced plans to end the program for some citizens this year. IOCC's previous aid to Iraq included a distribution of food and hygiene supplies in early 2008 to 3,000 families living in Baghdad and Mosul.



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**For more information, contact Dan Christopoulos toll free 1-877-803-IOCC (4622).**

Sign up for IOCC's email alerts:  
[www.iocc.org/updates](http://www.iocc.org/updates)

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### *Play a vital role in supporting IOCC:*

- Display IOCC materials in fellowship hall
  - Insert IOCC ads in church bulletin
  - Answer questions on IOCC news
  - Show IOCC's annual DVD
  - Keep priests informed on IOCC news
- IOCC will provide materials.*

**Contact Vasi Jankovich  
at [vjankovich@iocc.org](mailto:vjankovich@iocc.org)  
or 1-877-803-IOCC (4622)**



The IOCC Foundation is a professionally managed, not-for-profit support organization which exists to further the work of IOCC and its charitable mission. Gifts to the IOCC Foundation remain permanently restricted and inviolate with a percentage of the assets disbursed annually to support the mission of International Orthodox Christian Charities. For further information contact **Dan Christopoulos, IOCC Director of Development**, toll free at 1-877-803-4622 or [dchristopoulos@iocc.org](mailto:dchristopoulos@iocc.org).

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