



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

SPECIAL ANTIOCHIAN CONVENTION EDITION • SUMMER 2015

IOCC ASSISTS SYRIAN CHRISTIANS TRAUMATIZED IN DEADLY ATTACK



IOCC/GOPA

Fleeing for their lives, more than 2,400 exhausted and traumatized Christians from northeastern Syria sought refuge in the towns of Hasakah and Qamishli after their small communities were terrorized in February. The attackers targeted a stretch of villages along the southern bank of the Khabour River, where they burned homes and churches, murdered a fleeing 16-year-old boy, and abducted 150 Assyrian Christian men, women and children from their homes.

For those who managed to

escape the attack and seek shelter in Hasakah, IOCC with its church partner, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA), provided food, medical attention, and emergency aid. IOCC/GOPA, which has offices in both Hasakah and Qamishli, responded to the immediate needs of more than 1,000 displaced Syrian families seeking shelter at the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church in the Al Nasreh neighborhood of

Hasakah with the distribution of food parcels, bedding, infant clothing and shoes. More than 600 of the survivors who fled the onslaught are children.

IOCC, an ACT Alliance member, is one of the few humanitarian organizations inside Syria providing immediate assistance to displaced families and elderly who have endured four years of a brutal war. Working across Syria, IOCC has provided relief to 2.5 million vulnerable people inside Syria since 2012.

PROTECTING SYRIA'S YOUNGEST REFUGEES FROM MALNUTRITION

Melhem, 4, was withering away from a poor diet and loss of appetite when IOCC health workers encountered him last summer. Melhem's parents, who fled with him from Syria to safety in Lebanon, arrived with little money to buy their son nourishing food and worried daily about his well-being. Melhem was diagnosed with acute malnutrition during an IOCC health screening of Syrian refugee children living near Mount Lebanon. Left unchecked, the little boy faced a slow, painful death.

Malnutrition carries serious health consequences for a young child, particularly those under five. Being deprived of important nutrients can hinder physical growth, impair vision and stunt brain development. Malnutrition is also linked to nearly half of all childhood deaths. Thousands of Syria's refugee

children in Lebanon face this deadly threat every day. In cooperation with UNICEF, IOCC is working to prevent, screen, and treat malnutrition in Syria's refugee children as well as improve infant and young child feeding practices among Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. In addition to assisting children, IOCC's nutrition surveillance program is also providing nutrition training to staff in Lebanon's healthcare centers, and an awareness campaign that has educated more than 13,000 new and expectant mothers about emergency nutrition and breastfeeding.

Three months after an IOCC regimen of eating specially formulated high-protein, high-calorie foods and milk to boost rapid weight gain, Melhem's cheeks are round again and his once bony limbs have filled out from the added pounds. IOCC



Tiziana Cavali/IOCC

health workers will continue to monitor Melhem in the near future to make sure he keeps the weight on. Nearly 80,000 refugee kids have been screened for malnutrition and more than 1,300 undernourished children like Melhem have been successfully treated by IOCC since 2013.

GAZA FAMILIES FACE GROWING WATER CRISIS



IOCC

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 ongoing water delivery to 20 large refillable tanks 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 aid agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.

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.



This special edition of News & Needs is edited by Mark Hodde and Rada Tierney.



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

IOCC is a member of

actalliance

ORTHODOX YOUTH GATHER FOR SERVICE LEADERSHIP

When record rainfall drenched the Midwest last summer and triggered massive flooding in communities across Minnesota and Iowa, teen volunteers from St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church in Minneapolis were among the dozen members of an IOCC Orthodox Action Team who traveled to hard-hit Rock Rapids, Iowa, to help an elderly flood survivor clear waterlogged debris from his home. Orthodox Christian youth across the U.S. also have a history of eagerly volunteering their time and energy to assist IOCC in helping families rebuild storm-damaged homes and assemble emergency kits for disaster survivors.

IOCC is fostering this philanthropic spirit among Orthodox youth through its inaugural *Serv-X-Treme!* Youth Leadership Conference. Teen delegates appointed by hierarchs from the US pan-Orthodox community will come together in Minneapolis and Chicago this summer for a week



Dan Christopoulos / IOCC

of meaningful opportunities to serve others while developing a better understanding of Orthodox Christian philanthropy and diakonia, or service. Along with workshops led by Orthodox community leaders, teens will also spend time in hands-on service projects. *Serv-X-Treme!* Youth

Leadership Conference is part of a broader effort by IOCC to develop the Orthodox Christian Action Network (Orthodox CAN!), a US-based initiative to nurture and activate the Orthodox community's value of philanthropy through volunteerism across all age groups.

IOCC WORKS TO EASE STRAIN ON SCHOOLS IN LEBANON



Ramzi Hattar/IOCC

The influx of Syrian refugee children into Lebanon is challenging school administrators and straining school facilities to meet the needs of students seeking to continue their studies. IOCC is working to ease the strain on schools in Lebanon, and to ensure a healthy and safe learning environment for Lebanese children and their Syrian classmates. This school in Bar Elias is one of more than 50 Lebanese public schools in disrepair being rehabilitated by IOCC to improve conditions in the classrooms and on the school grounds. Plumbing, electrical systems, and playgrounds are being upgraded to meet safety standards, while classroom improvements include new paint, windows and doors. The school rehabilitation project by IOCC is aimed at improving school conditions for more than 7,500 Lebanese children and 5,000 young refugees.

TURNING ADVERSITY INTO OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN IN THE WEST BANK



George Malki/IOCC

Across the West Bank, Palestinian women, particularly those living in the isolated north, struggle to support their families because of few opportunities to develop income earning job skills. For some of the women, their homes are too distant from city jobs, while others face cultural obstacles. “The economic situation is very difficult,” said Mazouza, 53, a mother of six. “I only completed the 9th grade. Our customs do not allow us to go out and search for a job, so it is especially difficult for a woman. Besides, there are rarely any opportunities available for men, let alone the women.”

Farming is often the only option available to these rural women, but an unreliable water supply and travel restrictions to work their lands hinder hopes of rising above hunger and poverty. IOCC is helping empower more than 200 women in the West Bank with sustainable methods to feed their families and earn desperately needed income. IOCC is providing the most vulnerable female-headed households and families with small children with agricultural supplies and training to grow high-yield, organic home gardens or raise livestock like sheep or poultry that will provide food and marketable farm products.

Hilweh, 48, was skeptical about some of the farming techniques including drip irrigation, but soon became a believer when she saw her home garden come to life and produce a newfound opportunity to help her family. “I managed to plant

tomatoes, eggplant, spinach and onions. I was able to sell most of the crop, some we benefited from, and the rest we distributed to relatives.”

Newly trained egg producers like Rana and Mazouza share Hilweh’s enthusiasm about their path to self-sufficiency thanks to the chickens and animal husbandry training they received from IOCC. “This project is a gift from God,” said Mazouza. “We are selling the eggs at a very good rate. Our monthly income from selling the eggs is about \$80 and of course we have them for ourselves at all times too. I am thankful to the donors and to IOCC.”



George Malki/IOCC