



## Confronting a Crippling Disease

### *A Community Approach to Recovery*

Endawok, an Ethiopian merchant, described it this way: “When I got acute attacks, I felt really bad. Sometimes, I even became unconscious.”

She was relating the symptoms of podoconiosis, or “podo,” as it’s often called—a debilitating disease she has fought for 35 years. Caused by prolonged exposure of bare feet to irritants in Ethiopia’s volcanic soil, podo is marked by severe swelling of the feet and legs, along with crippling bouts of pain that can leave people unable to move—dramatically affecting their ability to work. Although it’s not contagious, podo often results in patients being ostracized from their families and communities.

Since many rural Ethiopians go barefoot, podo is a widespread problem—one that IOCC has been fighting since 2010 with a unique community-based approach.

Gebeyehu, a farmer and father, has become a valuable ambassador. As a young man, he noticed his feet starting to swell. As the attacks grew worse, the accompanying pain would leave him bedridden for days at a time, making it difficult to farm and care for his family.



*Farmer Gebeyehu*

Gebeyehu suffered with podo for years until visiting an IOCC-supported health center. With treatment, his condition improved dramatically. He gladly volunteered to help spread the word about podo prevention and treatment.

This community-based model recruits ambassadors like Gebeyehu who can speak from experience about podo—and, thus, carry great credibility in their villages. With a wide smile he said, “I am

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*Since beginning treatment at an IOCC-supported clinic, Endawok no longer has acute attacks, so she can now work and care for her family more easily.*

FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

Dear Friend,

I pray that you and your loved ones are well as Great Lent draws toward a close and we prepare for the joy of Pascha.

At the time of this writing, we're watching the developing crisis in Ukraine and coordinating with partners for response. I'm grateful that IOCC is able to live our mission of responding to human need in practical ways. Please pray with us for everyone affected. We'll continue sharing updates as we have them.

At the same time, our global work continues, in this issue. learn about how, through IOCC, you continue bringing hope to those fighting disease in Ethiopia, serving women and girls with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and reaching families facing compound crises in Lebanon.

As the light of Pascha approaches—and the renewal of spring begins—may God grant us the strength to serve Him by serving others, and may we give thanks always for the honor of doing so.

In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou  
Executive Director & CEO

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*Clinics like this one in rural Ethiopia provide treatment and training for podo patients.*

happy to be elected as the head of this patient-led group because it will allow me to teach others about the prevention and treatment of podo. I know that I can get more people with podo to join the group, especially when they see how my condition has improved."

Endawok, the merchant, also reported significant improvement and no acute attacks in the year since she began treatment through an IOCC program.

Providing aid in Ethiopia has always been challenging. It's difficult to cover large swaths of rural territory. Today, the pandemic and civil upheavals have further complicated an already complex environment.

Nevertheless, IOCC continues this crucial and successful program. To date, 65,000 Ethiopians have undergone treatment; over a million have received awareness education; and more than 1,200 midlevel government healthcare workers have been trained. With commitment and ongoing investment from groups including the National Ladies' Philoptochos Society, and Izumi Foundation, IOCC will continue helping rural Ethiopians defeat this disease and reclaim their health.



# Bringing Crucial Health Services to Lebanon

*A Program Built in Partnership with UNICEF*

“If it wasn’t for this program,” said Marina, age 74, “I would have lost my life.”

Marina is one of many residents of Beirut who have benefited from a comprehensive public health program implemented by IOCC, in partnership with UNICEF.

Over the past three years, Lebanon has been hit by an economic crisis, the devastating Beirut port explosion, and the COVID-19 pandemic—in addition to becoming home to over 800,000 refugees (UNHCR). All this has left many unable to afford basics including medical treatment.

To reach some of those most in need, IOCC is helping three health clinics serve more people in the Karantina neighborhood, a densely populated area affected by the Beirut explosion. At each facility, diagnostic tests are free, and consultations cost just 15 cents.



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The program was featured in a Forbes article on UNICEF partnerships—and, more important, it is saving lives. Marina, for example, had suffered from chronic pain for three years but couldn’t afford an expensive private clinic. After visiting one of the IOCC-supported clinics, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

The cancer was detected early enough to be treated with surgery, and Marina is feeling much better. “Thank you,” she said, “for saving my life.”



*Serving in an area hard hit by the Beirut explosion, the Karantina clinic is providing residents with basic health services.*

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC), is the official humanitarian relief and development 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.

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*Greenhouses at a residence for girls and women with disabilities provide fresh produce and occupational therapy for residents.*

## Sowing Seeds of Hope in Bosnia and Herzegovina

### *A Small Investment Making a Big Impact*

A key part of IOCC's mission is supporting the humanitarian efforts of the Orthodox Church around the world. Such is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country dogged by poverty where social institutions struggle with limited resources.

Here, IOCC is working with the Serbian Orthodox Church's Diocese of Zvornik and Tuzla. The diocese's humanitarian organization, Trojeručica, has long offered programs serving schools, social institutions, and people in need. It also coordinates and provides administrative support to all the diocese's parish-level humanitarian initiatives.

In one such program, a recent grant from the IOCC Foundation ([iocc.org/foundation](http://iocc.org/foundation)) is helping IOCC and Trojeručica support food production at

a residence for girls and women with disabilities. The program built and equipped a new 2,150 square foot greenhouse at the institute and repaired two existing greenhouses. Using seeds, fertilizer, and drip irrigation, the greenhouses will eventually yield some 10,000 pounds of vegetables a year—meeting about 50% of residents' needs and dramatically reducing the center's costs.

Through the same program, agricultural experts trained the institute's staff in vegetable production and land management. Greenhouse production also provides occupational therapy for some residents.

This single program is just one example of how a relatively small investment can make a significant impact and yield lasting benefits for the people IOCC serves.

*New and repaired greenhouses mean more fresh produce for center residents.*



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