WHAT’S NEWS AT UTSS:

For the first time in the history of mankind, people with albinism were celebrated around the globe on June 13, 2015.

This came in response to the first UN sanctioned International Albinism Awareness Day (IAAD) which transpired as a result of advocacy by Under The Same Sun (UTSS) and cooperation with various UN bodies (specific thanks to the late Ambassador Yusuf Mohamed Ismail Baribari of Somalia and members of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights).

On this day, albinism groups from over 25 African nations hosted IAAD celebrations as well as Canada, USA, UK, Ireland, Switzerland, France, Italy, Spain, Finland, Belgium, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan and other countries we have yet to hear from. UTSS participated in IAAD celebrations in Vancouver, Canada; at the UN in Geneva, Switzerland and Sengerema, Tanzania. (For more information about IAAD celebrations in various countries, CLICK HERE and then click on country flags found on the home page)
Tanzania is where it all began for UTSS, and the town of Sengerema is located on a major highway at the epicenter of where the attacks and killings of persons with albinism began to escalate in 2007. **Sengerema was also the epicenter of our June 13th IAAD celebrations.**

On May 1, 2014, UTSS unveiled a Monument celebrating albinism on a roundabout of the highway running through Sengerema’s town center. The monument incorporates the names of all attack victims to date and portrays a life size metal statue depicting an enlightened father who does not have albinism holding his child with albinism on his shoulders while an educated mother, also without albinism, puts a wide brimmed hat on the child’s head to protect him from the sun. It looks to a hopeful future in Tanzania where an inclusive family can live a normal life.

Our IAAD celebration was attended by government representatives from Tanzania, Canada, the US and France. At the center of the celebration was a large group of people with albinism from the local chapter of the Tanzania Albinism Society as well as children from several of the schools our Education Program partners with.

The names of all victims of attack in Tanzania were read by Vicky Ntetema, the Executive Director of UTSS Tanzania, and a moment of silence was observed in memory of their premature and unnecessary loss of life, limbs, safety & love.

Part of the IAAD celebration included a marching band from Mingas English Medium School where 21 of the students with albinism in our Education Program attend; 9 in primary and 12 in secondary school.
A press conference was held 2 days prior to IAAD to help prepare the nation for this significant celebration.

It was covered by radio, newspaper & television. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, we wanted the nation to see some of their fellow citizens with albinism who had survived brutal attacks. In attendance at the press conference were:

Limli Luchoma, the most recent survivor of ritual attack at the time of the press conference. She is a 30 year old mother of 4 who lost her right arm just below the elbow in a machete attack by 2 unidentified men on May 14, 2015.

Munghu Masaga, a 35 year old woman with albinism and mother of 7 children was brutally attacked at her home on August 16, 2014, when two unidentified attackers cut off her left arm below the elbow. She and her family are now living in a UTSS safe house and receiving assistance to forge a new life for Munghu and her family.

Five children with albinism who had lost limbs due to ritual attacks over the past few years were also present. Several days after this press conference the children would find themselves in New York City receiving new prosthetic limbs.

Elissa Montanti, CEO & Founder of Global Medical Relief Fund (www.gmrfchildren.org) is the primary funder of this miracle for all 5 children along with partnership from the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and UTSS. Elissa and her staff will be hosting the kids for several months while they are being fitted for their new prosthetic limbs and a new lease on life. (For more information about the children’s experience in New York, click here)
On the date of the press conference the youngest of the 5 children, and the most recent child to be attacked in Tanzania, was 6 year old Baraka. On March 07, 2015, he lost his right hand in a witchcraft-related attack. Baraka is a very sweet, good natured little boy with the most captivating smile.

When the TV cameras started rolling at the press conference, the heroic survivors of attack revealed the scars from their severed limbs. This was done to ensure the country remains aware of their humanity, their unnecessary suffering, and the ongoing attacks.

“We continue to dream of a day when all people with albinism will take their rightful place throughout every level of society and the days of discrimination will be a faint memory.”

UTSS Education Program Partners with a New School in Mwanza

During our most recent visit to Tanzania we were able to meet the students and staff of the Alliance School, the most recent addition to the list of local schools used in Tanzania by our Education Program. It is a beautiful facility and the school has a truly inclusive and kind spirit.

The students with albinism were happy, thriving in their studies and had a sense of belonging. During our visit Peter was able to address the student body & the staff with words of gratitude, encouragement and celebration of Albinism.

As our time at the Alliance School came to a close, Peter gathered all the students with albinism around him and prayed a prayer of blessing and safety over each one.
The Church Celebrates Albinism

The day after our IAAD celebrations in Sengerama was a Sunday, and UTSS was invited to continue the celebration at BMCC Church in Mwanza. Pastor Valentine Mbuke and his congregation have been allies with UTSS and people with albinism for several years now. Like most Sundays in this church, there was a large group of PWA in attendance, including a good number of children from the surrounding area who are part of our Education Program. They know they are wanted, respected and loved here and are always given the front row seats due to their low vision. Peter Ash was the guest speaker that morning, and the PWA in attendance did not want to miss a word. We all celebrated people with albinism together.

Gearing Up for the Pan African Albinism Conference (PAAC)
November 19 – 22, 2015

The Julius Nyerere International Convention Centre (JNICC) is an ultra-modern facility located in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It is named after Julius Nyerere, Tanzania’s first president.

As we tour this grand facility, our staff is going into high gear since UTSS will be hosting the first truly international albinism conference in this location. There will be Albinism Association representatives from at least 26 African countries in attendance. In addition, guests and specialized speakers will be coming from other countries like Canada, USA, UK, Switzerland (UN), Australia, New Zealand and others. All sessions will be professionally and simultaneously translated into English, Kiswahili and French.

In anticipation of our guest’s arrival, we also met with the management of the Holiday Inn in Dar es Salaam where all our guests will be staying. They were most accommodating as we negotiate for the best prices as well as some low vision accommodations. Several floors of the hotel have now been reserved for our guests attending the PAAC event.
As we talk with the hotel management about a less formal venue for a social event where our guests can relax and get to know each other better, they tell us about one of their facilities called Jangwani Seabreeze Resort. It seemed only right that we check it out on behalf of our PAAC guests. What we found was a magnificent spot nestled beneath the shade of grass roofs and palm trees on a beach on the Indian Ocean. Who could ask for more!!

As you can see, UTSS continues to remain active and true to advocacy and education as we address the crisis so many people with albinism are facing in Tanzania, Africa and worldwide. Our work cannot continue to expand without your alliance and generous financial support. No contribution is too small.

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