

## Humanitarian Efforts

In 1987, the ILDS established the International Foundation for Dermatology (IFD) to improve the care of skin disease in underserved areas of the low-income world. One of those areas is Tanzania, located on the east coast of sub-Saharan Africa and home to tens of thousands of people with albinism.

Tanzania has one of the highest rates of albinism in the world. About 1 in 1,500 Tanzanians are albino, compared to 1 in 20,000 worldwide. With no natural protection from the hot tropical sun, these albinos develop cancers of the skin at very early ages, often by age 20. Unless something is done, many will not live to see their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. It's a significant public health problem.



[www.hatsonforskinhealth.org](http://www.hatsonforskinhealth.org)

## Global Program to Help Albinos in Tanzania

During the 22nd World Congress of Dermatology in Seoul, Korea, the ILDS and Stiefel, a GSK company, hosted a press briefing to announce *Hats On For Skin Health*, a global initiative to raise funds to purchase hats and other sun-protective items for albinos living in Tanzania. More than 30 international journalists attended the press briefing to learn about the program.



Press briefing at WCD 2011 in Seoul, Korea

At the WCD press briefing, Stiefel announced that the company will donate \$20,000 (USD) to *Hats On For Skin Health* and is proud to add its resources towards helping prevent skin cancer. Stiefel hopes to inspire others, especially the Dermatology community, to join the effort to help albinos protect their skin. As Korea was the local host for WCD, the Stiefel Korea Business Unit contributed an additional \$5,000 USD in support of the program.

## A Unique Population in Great Need

For various reasons including social stigma, lack of education and few job opportunities, albinos suffer diminished lives, characterized by poverty and marginalization. Because they look different, they face discrimination at all levels of society.

One of the few job options open to them is manual labor. As you can imagine, manual labor in the hot African sun can have implications for albinos, especially given that few are aware of the damage caused by prolonged sun exposure.

The following picture tells the story. This young albino man has partial sun protection but he hasn't kept his collar up and the brim of his hat is not wide enough to provide adequate protection. The image shows the signs of both short-term sun exposure and more chronic sun exposure. The latter are likely to be early lesions that can lead to skin cancer.



Young albino man

## The Regional Dermatology Training Center

Located within the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, the Regional Dermatology Training Center (RDTC) is a well-established training center and the hub for ILDS and IFD care programs in East Africa.



Mount Kilimanjaro

## Call to Action

Our desire is to raise awareness about the plight of the albinos in East Africa as well as providing practical sun protection to help prevent skin cancer. To that end, we have set an initial goal of providing 12,000 hats to albinos in Tanzania.

We are reaching out to the wider Dermatology community to help reach this goal. With more than 100,000 Dermatologists worldwide, we hope the campaign will continue to expand with support from Dermatologists and their societies, as well as individuals from around the world.

Two ILDS member societies have already signed on as *Hats On For Skin Health* supporters. The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) has joined and is accepting donations via their website. As local country hosts of WCD, the Korean Dermatology Association (KDA) has also announced its support for the program.

Visit [www.hatsonforskinhealth.org](http://www.hatsonforskinhealth.org)



We would appreciate your help in spreading the message about this important campaign. To learn more about what you or your society can do to help, contact Professor Roderick Hay.

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To learn about *Hats On For Skin Health* or to make a donation, please visit the campaign website at [www.hatsonforskinhealth.org](http://www.hatsonforskinhealth.org). Funds can make an impact on the skin health of albinos in East Africa.

The primary function of the RDTC is to train and educate healthcare leaders at the primary care level, known as medical officers. Since its creation, the RDTC has trained over 215 medical officers from at least 15 different countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Patients come to the RDTC from huge distances because it's the only facility they have.

Since much of the work is based on the needs of the local community, it was quickly recognized that albinos, in particular, needed help desperately. Thus, the RDTC established the Albino Assistance Program which includes a four-wheel drive mobile skin clinic staffed by a doctor and nurse who regularly visit nearby villages. During these visits, the staff members look at the skin of patients to identify early signs of skin cancer. They also provide education about avoiding the damages of the sun.



## The Darker Side of Albinism

Many of you may have seen reports in recent years of brutal attacks on albinos, including murder, in sub-Saharan Africa. Part of this is due to local superstitions that albinos and the organs of albinos possess supernatural properties that bring the possessor good fortune or good health.

Since 2007, there have been more than 60 albino murders recorded throughout Tanzania and Burundi. The governments of both countries have taken very firm measures to try and suppress these attacks. In Tanzania, they have even appointed an albino minister tasked with improving the treatment of albinos in the country.

The RDTC aims to minimize the discrimination faced by people with albinism in Africa and does this by linking with other groups such as the YMCA and youth theater groups to educate about albinism.

## Ongoing relationship with Stiefel

Stiefel and the ILDS have been working together since 2007 when Stiefel donated \$300,000 to finance construction of the first dermatology ward at the RDTC in Moshi, Tanzania.



Stiefel-sponsored dermatology ward under construction in Moshi, Tanzania

This ward will make a huge difference to both dermatological education and care. ILDS would like to thank Stiefel for its ongoing commitment in providing excellent dermatological education and care to albinos in this part of the world.