



ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA CELIACHIA - ONLUS

Saharawi Project

Background
Challenge
Objectives
Activities
Next steps



September 2008 – Genova – AOECS

Who are the Saharawis: geographical and historical picture



- ü Located in the **Western Sahara** they had their own forms of language, culture and social organization. Their territory was composed up of desert but it was very rich in **mineral resources**.
- ü From the end of the XV century until World War II the area was under **Spanish rule**.
- ü Counting on Spain's acquiescence, King Hassan II of **Morocco** had expansionist designs and consequently occupied Western Sahara until the beginning of the '70s.
- ü Forced into **exodus** through the desert as far as the Algerian border, the population set up their first refugee camp near Tindouf.
- ü Since then the Saharawi population has aimed to gain **international recognition** as the Democratic Saharawi Arab Republic as proclaimed in 1976.



New geography of Coeliac Disease

Until recently CD was believed to be almost exclusive to people of European origin and almost unknown among black Americans and in the Far East.

Now, thanks to endomysial (EMA) and tissue transglutaminase (tTAG) assays, an unexpected frequency of CD has been discovered in areas of the world such as northern Africa, the Middle East and India.

It is therefore possible that CD may be one of the most common causes of chronic diarrhoea and malnutrition in such zones.



[Medical case study:the Saharawis]

- ü an unusually large number of them showed the **characteristic symptoms of coeliac disease**
- ü a frequency of coeliac disease of **5.6%**



[Problems related with CD treatment in Saharawi]

- ü a generalized shortage of food
- ü absence of specific dietary products
- ü **lack of information in the medical class** and the cultural backwardness of the population
- ü commercial gluten-free products are **very expensive** and not always well-accepted
- ü inhospitable environment
- ü lack of food, water and proper sanitation



Achievements

- n Helping Saharawis to know the right way to deal with CD as regards the social and medical treatment
- n Giving them the chance to carry on a normal life as coeliacs and raise their life expectation



“AIC for Saharawi”

In 2006 we became a partner of an Italian NGO (Nord-Sud) and an Italian Region in a development cooperation project reorganised at the International level. We signed an agreement with the Saharawi Ministries



[Action Plan]

- ü Long distance financial support
- ü Gluten-free flour shipments
- ü Alimentary education for the population
- ü Medical action



[Support campaign]

- n The number of long distance supporters has been increasing. So far **600** Italian families support a Saharawi coeliac.
- n Their financial support is utilised to buy **alternative food** like meat, eggs, vegetables and GF cereals to be distributed to the families.



Gluten-free flour shipments

- § Every 6 months we provide **gluten-free flour** through the Saharawi Red Cross and under the direct control of the Saharawi authorities.
- § In recent months the AIC, through the Saharawi Red Cross, has been buying the gluten-free gofio in Algeria, greatly reducing costs of purchase and transport.



[Alimentary education]

Gluten-free booklet:

- ü Information about a correct gluten-free diet for families
- ü Clinical information about CD for medical and paramedical staff



Medical actions

ü **Provide**

- diagnostic kits for screening
- tools and equipment (surgery unit)
- training to the local medical team

ü **Investigate:**

- coeliac population by census
- genetics



[Intention]

Give the project a new perspective

We hope to transform
the present Saharawi Project
into an
AOECS Project
under direct Italian co-ordination

130,000 €/year is the financial commitment



Thanks!



For further information please contact

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