

UN ORGANIZATION RECOGNIZES SACH

The Save a Child's Heart organization (SACH), based at Wolfson Medical Center in Holon, has finally become recognized officially as a United Nations non-governmental organization. It recently received final confirmation of its status from the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which will enable it to work closely towards a common global agenda with member states, UN staffers and other NGOs.

SACH, founded by the late pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Ami Cohen, has since 1995 had a mission to improve the quality of pediatric cardiac care for children from developing countries and create centers of competence in these countries. Its volunteers believe that every child with congenital heart disease deserves the best medical treatment available, regardless of nationality, religion, color, gender or financial situation. Volunteer doctors and nurses regularly perform heart surgery on children at Wolfson and travel to developing countries to do surgery and train local doctors.

Cohen came on aliya from the US in 1992 and joined the Wolfson staff, serving as deputy chief of cardiovascular surgery and then director of pediatric cardiac surgery.

In 1988, while serving in the US armed forces in Korea, the head of the international organization Save the Hearts, which sent orphaned and indigent Korean children to Western countries for medical care not available locally, approached Cohen; he was so impressed with the concept that he asked for and received permission from his superiors to participate. During the remainder of his time in Korea, he performed 35 pediatric cardiac operations.

After his move to Israel, an Ethiopian doctor referred to Cohen by a mutual friend at the University of Massachusetts asked him for help with two children in desperate need of heart surgery. Since then, SACH has repaired the hearts of more than 2,500 children from a wide variety of countries. Tragically, the good doctor died in a 2001 accident while climbing the Kilimanjaro Mountain, but his life project – which serves as his memorial – continues.