



## **OUR COMMITMENT TO RESUMING SURGERY REMAINS STRONG**

**Dr. Ruben Ayala, Chief Medical Officer**

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Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Operation Smile remains committed to providing our patients with the highest quality of cleft surgery and comprehensive care, and we are working in close collaboration with ministries of health and local authorities to determine when it will be safe to resume these activities in the countries where we work.

We firmly believe that comprehensive cleft care supports the entire well-being of our patients, and that these services, while considered “elective” by some, should be categorized as essential. The timely delivery of this care is vital to the health and dignity of those who are affected by cleft conditions.

While we have relied on virtual platforms to continue serving our patients, we’re still unable to provide direct patient care in nearly every place where we work. We’re beginning to resume direct activity in places where health authorities have deemed it safe to do so. In late May, we were able to resume providing surgeries in Vietnam and Italy. Our care centers in Morocco, where patients receive year-round services like dentistry, speech therapy and psychosocial consultations, reopened in early June, and our center in Nicaragua is expected to reopen in July.

In these cases, and in every case going forward, the decision to resume surgery was and will be based on the latest scientific evidence and executed with the safety of patients, volunteers and staff as the top priority. These decisions were made in close collaboration with the countries’ ministries of health and local authorities, and each approach was tailored to the respective locations’ unique circumstances and capabilities.

Understanding the negative – even life-threatening – effects that cleft conditions present to our patients who are waiting for surgery, we’re providing as much support to them as we can. To ensure their health and well-being, we’re providing nutritional assistance, hygiene kits and virtual health services to support them and their health needs.

Our hearts go out to the nearly 10,000 Operation Smile patients who are still waiting for life-changing surgery and dental care. Our promise to bring them hope and healing endures in this challenging time. We will remain vigilant and return with the essential surgery and treatment that they need as soon as it’s safe to do so.

With gratitude,

Dr. Ruben Ayala  
Chief Medical Officer