



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

The Middle East Council of Churches

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**Final Statement
of the meeting of the Middle East Council of Churches' Executive
Committee**

Antonine University, Hadath-Baabda, Lebanon

25-26 January 2018

The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches held its meeting at the Antonine University in Hadath-Baabda, in Lebanon, and was chaired by the Presidents of the Council representing the four Church families that form the Council, namely:

For the Oriental Orthodox Family: His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church,

For the Catholic Family: His Beatitude Mar Louis Raphael I Sako, Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans,

For the Evangelical Family: Right Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Union of Beirut,

In addition to the members of the Executive Committee.

The Head of the Orthodox Family, His Beatitude Patriarch Youhanna X, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for the Greek Orthodox, apologized for not being able to attend the meeting.

The meeting was attended by MECC's Secretary General Father Michel Jalakh, the associate Secretary Generals and the staff of the Council.

Following the opening prayer on the occasion of the last day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the participants examined the items on the agenda and discussed the report submitted by the Secretary General containing an inventory of the work carried out by the General Secretariat throughout the past year, as well as draft proposals for the strategic plan for the Council's future work. They also listened to a presentation of the situation of refugees and displaced persons due to the difficult conditions in the Middle East through a report on the Council's programs in Lebanon and Syria, and to a brief presentation on MECC's communication and social media activities.

The participants paid tribute to the Lebanese President, government and people and commended the political and administrative achievements realized during the mandate of President Michel Aoun, especially in combating terrorism, which contributed to the progress of Lebanon and the strengthening of the world's confidence in it.

During the meeting, Dr. Souraya Bechealany was unanimously elected as the Acting Secretary General of the Council after the resignation of its Secretary General Father Michel Jalkh, following his appointment as Rector of the Antonine University, which prevented him from continuing to fulfill his mission as Secretary General. Dr. Souraya Bechealany will continue Father Jalkh's mandate which runs until September 2020. It is worth mentioning that Dr. Bechealany is the first woman to be elected by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) for this position.

The participants thanked the Council's Secretary General, Father Michel Jalkh, and commended the work of the General Secretariat during the previous period. They expressed their full support for the Acting Secretary General and all the Council's staff, while stressing the need to uphold the Council in its work and activities and in the fulfillment of its role as a federative entity for the churches in the Middle East and as an advocate of the authentic presence and deep-rootedness of Christians in the East.

It was unanimously agreed to appoint Father Jalkh as Secretary General ad honorem of the Middle East Council of Churches, in line with the established practice in the Council.

The Executive Committee stressed during its meeting on the following:

- 1- The importance of the Christian presence in the East and the need to revive it and strengthen it in light of the difficult circumstances faced by the countries in the Middle East, by supporting the work and activities of the Council aimed at anchoring the presence of Christians in their land.
- 2- The seriousness of the current situation in the countries of the Middle East. In this regard, the participants stressed the need to end the conflict in Syria through the adoption of peaceful solutions and to work towards the immediate cessation of acts of violence, persecution and genocide against Christians in Iraq, particularly in Mosul and the Nineveh Plain. They condemned the terrorist acts and blatant assaults against the churches and places of worship in Egypt and called for the speedy return of the displaced, especially those in Lebanon, to their homeland after the re-establishment of security. They also tackled the serious repercussions of the refugee crisis on the general situation in Lebanon, and commended its spirit of hospitality. They also praised the value of coexistence prevailing in Jordan and its warm hospitality for the displaced, and called for the achievement of unity of its territory in Cyprus and the protection of the rights of its citizens.
- 3- The need to preserve the historical identity of Jerusalem as a city open to all believers of the three monotheistic religions and the refusal of its Judaization. In the same vein, the participants denounced the attacks against any religious authority for whatever reason, especially in light of the attack that targeted His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem for the Greek Orthodox.
- 4- They renewed their appeal to the decision-makers and all persons of good will to release all the abductees, in particular the two bishops of Aleppo, Boulos Yazji and Youhanna Ibrahim, as well as the kidnapped priests.
- 5- They denounced the takeover on the church endowments in Mardin and Tur Abdin in Turkey and in Jerusalem, while expressing their appreciation for the measures taken by the State in Egypt which recently built a new cathedral in the administrative capital.

At the end of the meeting, the Presidents of the Council and the members of the Executive Committee expressed their thanks to the Antonine University in the person of its Rector, Father Michel Jalkh, and all his associates for hosting this meeting.

Finally, all the participants raised a prayer of thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who bestowed His grace and blessings upon the Executive Committee meeting, urging the Lord Jesus to protect the faithful in the East so that they would remain witnesses to their faith in their divine Redeemer in the midst of the crises and difficulties, convinced that He will turn their ordeals into salvation and persuaded that "Indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory" (Romans 8:17).