



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

Middle East Overview – October 2020

Clash of Civilizations?



He was killed precisely because he incarnated the Republic", Mr Macron said. "He was killed because the Islamists want our future. They know that with quiet heroes like him, they will never have it." Oct 22, 2020, photo credit: Reuters.



Turkish President Erdogan with Ilham Aliyev, Azeri President,. October 3, 2020, photo credit: Modern policy

Headoffice

Beirut - Lebanon P.O. Box 11-5376
Tel: +961 1 353938 | Fax: +961 1 344896
info@mecc.org | www.mecc.org



Contents

1. BACKGROUND	2
2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION.....	3
Egypt	3
Jordan	3
Iraq	4
Lebanon	5
Palestine	6
Syria	7
Cyprus	8
3. The Corona Situation.....	9
Egypt	9
Jordan	10
Iraq	10
Lebanon	11
Palestine	11
Syria	12
Cyprus	13
3. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated)	14
Egypt	14
Jordan	14
Iraq	15
Lebanon	16
Syria	16
Cyprus	17
4. CHURCH ACTIVITIES.....	17
6. MECC Humanitarian activities October 2020:.....	42
7. CONCLUSION	48



1. Introduction

During October, things took a turn to the worse in the caucuses area. An intense military confrontation erupted between two former soviet states as hundreds of casualties have been recorded on both sides. Turkey, who is backing Azerbaijan and who is constantly attempting to establish a new Islamic Ottoman caliphate, condemned Armenia and accused it of starting the war, thus further exacerbating tensions. To make matters worse, it started exporting Islamist fighters from Syria to fight on the frontlines against Armenian troops. Moreover, nations such as Pakistan and entities Organization of Islamic Cooperation have condemned Armenia, highlighting the role of religious identity in this quarrel.

In other news, the beheading of a school teacher by a radicalized individual in France, caught the attention of French President Macron who made various statements on radical Islamists. This in turn enraged leaders of Islamic countries who accused him of using divisive rhetoric for political gain and alienating France's six million Muslims. Afterwards, brutal crimes followed as French citizens across France and the rest of the world were either maimed or savagely killed.

The Middle East Council of Churches is worried about how these two events will impact the fragile Middle East, which is inhabited by Muslims and Christians. Any form mishandling will lead to negative implications on the various peace-building initiatives that organizations such as the council have been trying to promote over the decades. Nevertheless, the council's activities have not seized during this period, and have continued to reach out to those in need, no matter what religious background they come from.



2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Egypt

- According to David Owen, an economist at HIS Markit, the last Egypt PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index) data shows positive signs for businesses.¹
- Minister of Planning and Economic Development Hala Al-Saeed claimed that the economy rose to the challenge inflicted by COVID-19 due to increased consumer demand and exports.²
- Egypt's central bank unexpectedly cut its main overnight interest rates by 50 basis points, saying exceptionally low inflation gave it room to help boost the economy.³
- Egypt's Minister of Planning and Economic Development Hala El-Said announced that the country's annual inflation rate has hit its lowest level in 14 years.⁴
- 15.7611 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.⁵



The pyramids can be seen over the city of Giza, 4.9 km southwest of Cairo (AP Photo)

Jordan

- According to the Businesspeople Association of Jordanian Expatriates, it had secured an Australian investment in telecommunications and information technology which will create 350 jobs for Jordanians in this sector.⁶

¹ Bloomberg, October 5, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-05/top-arab-economies-back-to-growth-with-year-s-first-egypt-uptick>

² Arab News, Oct 3, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1745116/business-economy>

³ Egypt Independent, Sept 25, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/egypt-cuts-interest-rates-by-50-bps-as-inflation-subsides/>

⁴ Mena, October 8, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100926853/Egypt-s-annual-inflation-rate-hits-lowest-level-in-14-years-Planning-Minister>

⁵ <http://www.cbe.org.eg/en/EconomicResearch/Statistics/Pages/ExchangeRatesListing.aspx>

⁶ Zawya, Oct 7, 2020,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/economy/story/Australian_investment_to_create_350_jobs_in_Jordans_IT_sector-SNG_186466589/



- The Jordan Investment Commission (JIC) and the Jordan Engineers Association (JEA) signed an agreement to increasing the level of coordination and cooperation aiming to ease procedures for investors.⁷
- The European Investment Bank (EIB) signed a cooperation agreement worth 1.4 million euros, on technical assistance with the Cities and Towns Development Bank (CVDB) in Jordan aiming to reduce energy consumption by 20% and to reach 15% renewable energy in total electricity production.⁸
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.⁹



Jordan wants to promote energy efficiency by cooperating with the European Investment Bank. Oct.9, 2020, photo credit: Econ Strum

Iraq

- The World Bank, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), released a statement that Iraq should refocus the country's political system towards the development of its private sector in a manner that would decrease its dependence on oil export.¹⁰
- Investors such as Iraqi-based KAPTA, launched an investor network that aims to support home-grown entrepreneurs amid a faltering business landscape.¹¹



Iraq's economy is still in peril as organizations call for reform, October 1, 2020, photo credit: Shutterstock.

⁷ Salaam Gateway, Sept 30, 2020, <https://www.salaamgateway.com/story/agreement-signed-to-ease-procedures-for-investors-in-jordan>

⁸ Econ Strum, Oct. 9, 2020, https://en.econostrum.info/EIB-supports-energy-efficiency-in-Jordanian-municipalities_a691.html

⁹ <http://statisticaldb.cbj.gov.jo/index?action=level4>

¹⁰ The National, Oct 1, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/iraq-needs-to-focus-on-development-and-economic-diversification-to-overcome-challenges-world-bank-says-1.1086631>

¹¹ Wamda, September 29, 2020, <https://www.wamda.com/2020/09/angel-network-looking-support-iraqs-startup-ecosystem>



- Iraq's National Investment Commission (NIC) declared that it is prepared to reactivate the lurking and halted projects and reshape them financially and technically to aid the economy.¹²
- The Iraqi government approved an economic reform plan to salvage the country's ailing economy battered by decades of war, mismanagement and endemic corruption.¹³
- 1193.79 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.¹⁴

Lebanon

- According to The BLOM Lebanon PMI index, the Lebanese economy is heading towards further contraction.¹⁵
- Lebanon and Israel held two sessions of indirect talks over their disputed maritime border, with the facilitation of the UNIFIL.¹⁶
- According to financial analysts, the Lebanese currency's value will continue to deteriorate due to the presence of excessive amount circulating within the economy.¹⁷
- The ex-Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn, announced the launch of a new business program at a the Kaslik university in Lebanon to provide training to local businesses, offer executive coaching to senior managers, and supply startups with funding and advice.¹⁸
- Governor of the Banque du Liban Riad Salameh during a meeting, stated that the severe crisis is now over in Lebanon.¹⁹



The talks were held at the UNIFIL headquarters in the Lebanese border town of Naqoura, Oct 14, 2020, photo credit: AFP

¹² The National, Oct. 8, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100925040/NIC-plans-to-Revitalize-Stalled-Projects-in-Iraq>

¹³ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/iraqi-government-approves-economic-reforms-to-extricate-country-from-crisis-1.1093158>

¹⁴ Central Bank of Iraq, <http://www.cbiraq.org/DataValues.aspx?dtFrm=10/31/2003&dtTo=02/18/2019&tmId=175&dtformat=MMM,yyyy>

¹⁵ The National News, Oct 5, 2020, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/economy/lebanon-s-economy-continues-to-deteriorate-as-government-formation-fails-1.1088719>

¹⁶ Aljazeera, Oct 14, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/14/lebanon-israel-talks-maritime-border>

¹⁷ Arabian Business, Oct 2, 2020, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/banking-finance/452546-inflation-spirals-out-of-control-as-lebanon-drowns-in-excess-pounds>

¹⁸ CNN, Oct 1, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/01/business/carlos-ghosn-lebanon-intl-hnk/index.html>

¹⁹ The 961, Oct 1, 2020, <https://www.the961.com/economic-crisis-over-riad-salameh/>



- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.²⁰

Palestine

- The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Ministers H.E Ayman Safadi of Jordan and H.E Ann Linde of Sweden hosted the third Ministerial Strategic Dialogue to discuss the regional development, stability and security.²¹
- According to a report by UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, Israel illegally advanced nearly 5,000 housing units, most of which are in outlying locations deep inside the occupied West Bank.²²
- Israel announced a decision that it will demolish a European-funded Palestinian primary school in Ras At-Tin herding community in the central West Bank.²³
- Saudi Arabia contributed 25 million USD for the sake of UNRWA to help the Agency's maintain critical services to 5.6 million Palestine refugees in the region.²⁴



Ongoing construction work seen at the illegal Israeli settlement of Givat Zeev, near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, Oct 5, 2020, photo credit: Middle East Monitor.

²⁰ <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>

²¹ OCHA, Oct 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/third-ministerial-strategic-dialogue-unrwa>

²² OCHA, Oct 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/statement-un-special-coordinator-middle-east-peace-process-0>

²³ Middle East Monitor, Oct 3, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201003-palestine-condemns-israels-plan-to-build-5400-new-settlement-units/>

²⁴ OCHA, Oct 5, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/kingdom-saudi-arabia-reaffirms-its-strong-support-unrwa-us-25>



Syria

- The Trump Administration imposed sanctions Wednesday 30 Sep, on entities and individuals in Syria. The sanctions came a day after intense clashes in southern Syria broke out between Russia-backed Syrian troops and local fighters.²⁵
- The government has doubled the price of fuel oil and increased the price of petrol by 80 percent. Economic experts indicate that this action will significantly increase prices of other products across the Syrian economy, and reduce both the competitiveness of Syrian manufacturers and the purchasing power of the population.²⁶
- Dozens of fires in the provinces of Lattakia, Tartous Homs and Hama have caused large-scale damage to over 9,000 hectares of agricultural and forested land are also reported destroyed.²⁷
- Syria's President Bashar al-Assad referred the bill on the state general budget for the 2021 fiscal year to the People's Assembly. The bill set the budget at SYP 8,500 billion, compared to 4,000 billion for the 2020 budget.²⁸
- Official Current Exchange Rate SP/USD: 1250 SP/USD
Current Exchange Rate in Black Market: 2420 SP/USD
The average of exchange Rate in Black Market in October 2020: 2340 SP/USD.



Prices of commodities and products have risen in Syria as the government increase fuel and petrol prices, June 19, 2019, photo credit: Reuters.

²⁵ AP News, Sept 30, 2020, <https://apnews.com/hub/bashar-assad>

²⁶ Alarabiya, Oct 21, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/10/21/Government-held-areas-of-Syria-raise-fuel-prices-blaming-US-sanctions>

²⁷ <https://www.syria-report.com/>

²⁸ SANA, Oct 22, 2020, <https://sana.sy/en/?p=207093>



Cyprus

- The Cypriot government announced that it will be suspending its citizen-investment program starting from November 1 due to corruption allegations. Moreover, it will re-instate a fast-track process for company registrations as part of a package of measures to revive the economy.²⁹
- Protests broke out on the streets against corruption following an investigation implicating high-ranking officials in passport sales.³⁰
- Tensions escalated between Cyprus and Greece from one side and Turkey from the other, over the Turkey's deployment of a search vessel, Oruc Reis, for a new energy exploration mission in disputed waters in the eastern Mediterranean.³¹
- The University of Cyprus Economics Research Centre in a research note it released, claimed that the economy continued to recover in August and September.³²
- 1. 18 USD Euro official currency value³³



Cyprus economy starts rebound, begins to shrug off tourism impact, Oct, 2020, photo credit: Cyprus Mail.

²⁹ Arab news, Oct 13, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1748261/middle-east>

³⁰ Al Jazeera, Oct 14, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/14/anti-corruption-protests-in-cyprus-following-al-jazeera-expose>

³¹ Aljazeera, Oct 14, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/14/east-med-crisis-erdogan-ramps-rhetoric-against-greece-cyprus>

³² Cyprus Mail, Oct 1, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/10/01/cyprus-economy-starts-rebound/>

³³ https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html



3. The Corona Situation

Egypt

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 107,736 corona confirmed cases
 - 99,555 recovered
 - 6,278 deaths
- With the decline in infections and deaths, Egypt has been easing relevant restrictions during the month as part of a coexistence plan to maintain anti-coronavirus precautionary measures while resuming economic activities.³⁴
 - Egypt is planning to apply the clinical trials on 6,000 people, as part of its testing for the prototype vaccine.³⁵
 - The advisor to the Egyptian President for Health Affairs, Mohamed Awad Taj El-Din, announced that 20% of Egyptians will receive the vaccine against the Corona virus.³⁶



The start of the high school and Al-Azhar high school final exams, amid severe precautionary measures, sterilization, and temperature measurement for students before the start of the exam on June 21, 2020 in Cairo, Egypt. (Photo by Ziad Ahmed/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

³⁴ Africa, October 21, 2020, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/10/21/egypt-reports-158-new-covid-19-cases-highest-since-mid-september/>

³⁵ Egypt Today, Oct 19, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/93310/Egyptian-health-minister-gets-2nd-shot-of-candidate-coronavirus-vaccine>

³⁶ RT, Oct 20, 2020, https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1165439



Jordan

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 75,866 corona confirmed cases
 - 7,740 recovered
 - 866 deaths
- According to the website Worldometer, Jordan moved up to 75th rank due to the increase in corona cases.³⁷
 - Jordan entered a nationwide 48-hour lockdown on October 9 for the first time in months as health officials worry a spike in coronavirus infections could threaten its overstretched healthcare system.³⁸
 - Jordan suspended schooling on 9 October until further notice.³⁹



Jordanian students, wearing protective masks, wait in line on the first day of school on Sept. 1, 2020, photo credit: Arab News.

Iraq

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 475,288 corona confirmed cases
 - 402,782 recovered
 - 10,966 deaths
- According to the office of the governor of Iraq's Erbil, the governor contracted the virus.⁴⁰



Archbishop Bashar Warda speaks at the opening of a new recovery center originally built by L'Oeuvre d'Orient, France, and prepared for Covid-19 patients by the Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil. (Photo by Stivan Shany, courtesy of the Archdiocese of Erbil)

³⁷ Roya News, Oct 20, 2020, <https://en.royanews.tv/news/22892/2020-10-20>

³⁸ Aljazeera, Oct 9, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/9/jordan-entered-nationwide-coronavirus-lockdown-for-two-days>

³⁹ Arab News, October 7, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1745341/middle-east>

⁴⁰ Anadolu Agency, October 20, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/iraq-erbil-governor-contracts-coronavirus/2012141>



- According to Chaldean Archbishop Bashar Warda about 2,000 Christian families were affected by Covid in Erbil.⁴¹

Lebanon

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 82,617 corona confirmed cases
 - 42,904 recovered
 - 643 deaths
- According to Lebanon's General Directorate of Public Security, Lebanon's security chief has contracted the virus.⁴²
 - Concerns are growing in Lebanon over the health sector's inability to provide hospital bed for covid patients.⁴³



As number of cases increase, there will be no more hospital beds left in the coming months, October 9, 2020, photo credit: The 961.

Palestine

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 54,060 corona confirmed cases
 - 46,773 recovered
 - 489 deaths
- Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Ishtaye announced on 8 October that the



*Harb Radwan, a Palestinian doctor, died from coronavirus in Hebron, West Bank, 8 October 2020
[PalestinePDP/Twitter]*

⁴¹ American Magazine, Oct 19, 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/10/15/christians-northern-iraq-covid-19-hospital-supplies>

⁴² Arab News, Oct 21, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1751846/middle-east>

⁴³The 961, Oct 7, 2020, <https://www.the961.com/few-vacant-beds-covid-19-lebanon/>



government is to tighten the measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 in the Palestinian territories.⁴⁴

- A Palestinian doctor aged 51 in Hebron, Harb Radwan, passed away due to his infection with the coronavirus.⁴⁵
- Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat contracted the Covid-19 and has been placed on a ventilator after being in critical condition.⁴⁶

Syria

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 5,789 corona confirmed cases
 - 2,021 recovered
 - 292 deaths
- The Syrian government has set up a temporary hospital for Covid-19 patients at a Damascus sports complex in preparation for what an official said was a possible second wave.⁴⁷
 - A lot of cases are still going unreported, and the actual number of Covid-19 cases is much higher," the WHO's Syria representative told Reuters news agency last week.⁴⁸
 - Doctors, nurses and aid workers have told Human Rights Watch that they face shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and restricted access to oxygen tanks.⁴⁹



A health worker with a face mask walks inside a hospital, as hospitals enforce a series of measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Damascus, Syria March 19, 2020. © 2020 Reuters/Omar Sanadiki

⁴⁴ Xinhuanet, October 8, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/08/c_139424632.htm

⁴⁵ Middle East Monitor, Oct 9, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201009-palestine-doctor-dies-of-coronavirus-in-hebron/>

⁴⁶ BBC, Oct 19, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54587544>

⁴⁷ BBC, October 13, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54522725>

⁴⁸ Reuters, Oct 7, 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-syria-capital/busy-damascus-cemetery-points-to-higher-pandemic-death-toll-in-syria-idUKKBN26S1VG>

⁴⁹ HRW, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/02/syria-health-workers-lack-protection-pandemic>



Cyprus

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 4,563 corona confirmed cases
 - 1,882 recovered
 - 26 deaths
- Cyprus witnessed an increase in corona cases per 100,000 overtaking Greece, Norway, Sweden and Germany.⁵⁰
 - Cyprus's police force increased checks on businesses and persons caught violating measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus⁵¹.
 - Petros Karayiannis, a member of the government's epidemiological team and professor of microbiology/molecular virology at the University of Nicosia medical school, claimed that Cyprus could soon deploy reliable rapid tests.⁵²



Police said on the 21st of October, they carried out around 1,000 checks in the past 24 hours and reported four businesses and 17 individuals caught violating measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus, Oct 21, 2020, photo credit: <https://cyprus-mail.com/>

⁵⁰ Cyprus Mail, October 20, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/10/20/coronavirus-cyprus-climbing-eu-infections-chart/>

⁵¹ Cyprus Mail, Oct 21, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/10/21/coronavirus-police-carry-out-1000-checks-book-21-for-violating-measures/>

⁵² Cyprus Mail, Oct 20, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/10/20/coronavirus-cyprus-could-soon-deploy-rapid-tests-in-covid-fight/>



4. THE REFUGEE SITUATION

Egypt

- The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a regional response plan to support Syrian refugees residing in Egypt and empower their host communities, as well as the Egyptian response plan for refugees and asylum seekers from Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Iraq and Yemen for the year 2020-2021.⁵³
- The UNHCR released a 3RP refugee and resilience plan detailing budgetary requirements of 171,983,476 USD for the year of 2021. The main focus of the plan is child protection, peaceful coexistence, reducing SGBV, and the safeguarding of basic rights.⁵⁴

Jordan

[The UNHCR in Jordan did not update the section regarding displacement]

The UNHCR states that there are currently 659,673 registered refugees in Jordan up until the beginning of September.

The proportion of Syrian displaced people registered within the UNHCR for September, are distributed as follows:

- 194,250 in Amman Governorate (29.5 %)
- 163,449 in Mafraq Governorate (24.8%)
- 135,725 in Irbid Governorate (20.6%)
- 96,004 in Zarqa Governorate (14.6%)
- 18,417 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
- 13,105 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
- 9,317 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
- 8,431 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
- 8,358 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
- 6,548 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)

⁵³ Egypt Today, Oct 6, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/92785/Egypt-is-obligated-to-protect-asylum-seekers-and-refugees>

⁵⁴ OCHA, Oct 6, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/egypt/egypt-3rp-regional-refugee-resilience-plan-response-syria-crisis-20202021>



- 3,650 in Aqaba Governorate (0.6%)
- 1,704 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)
- The World Food Program initiated a series of activities that will benefit 1 million refugees living in Jordan with a budget of almost JD500 million (\$700 million) over three years.⁵⁵
- The UNICEF launched a new program that aims to end the worst forms of child labour in Zarqa and Amman. Trained social workers will identify 400 of the most vulnerable boys and girls, of all nationalities, aged 6-18 and will begin working with them.⁵⁶

Iraq

The UNHCR states that there are currently 242,704 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq.

The proportion of displaced Syrian people registered within the UNHCR up until the beginning of October, are distributed as follows:

- 123,155 in Erbil (50.7%)
- 84,938 in Dahuk (35.0%)
- 31,256 in Sulaymaniyah (12.9%)
- 1,157 in Anbar (0.5%)
- 2,198 in other areas (0.8%)⁵⁷
- Germany donated 13.6 million euros in October to the UNHCR, to protect vulnerable Syrian refugee families in Iraq.⁵⁸
- Angela Merkel convened with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, and discussed a variety of topics including support for refugees and displaced people in Iraq.⁵⁹
- As part of a joint effort to modernize education data systems and improve the quality of learning in Iraq, the European Union, UNICEF, and UNESCO, signed an agreement with the Communications and Media Commission (CMC) for the provision of internet connectivity to over 3000 schools across 10 governorates.

⁵⁵ OCHA, Sept 24, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/1-million-vulnerable-jordanians-refugees-benefit-wfp-activities-2022>

⁵⁶ OCHA, Sept 28, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/unicef-launches-programme-end-child-labour-zarqa-and-amman>

⁵⁷ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

⁵⁸ OCHA, October 6, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/germany-contributes-additional-funding-support-thousands-vulnerable-refugee-families>

⁵⁹ Deutsch Welle, Oct. 20, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkel-meets-with-iraqi-prime-minister-in-berlin/a-55333017>



Lebanon

Since the beginning of October, the number of registered refugees in Lebanon is 879,529.

Refugees in Lebanon are distributed as follows:

- 340,600 in Bekaa (38.7%)
 - 236,635 in North Lebanon (26.9%)
 - 205,883 in Beirut (23.4%)
 - 96,411 in South Lebanon (11.0%)⁶⁰
-
- Deadly crossings from Lebanon to Cyprus surged due to the increasing economic crisis in the Middle Eastern countries.⁶¹
 - According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, Syrian refugees are increasingly facing forced evictions from their homes.⁶²

Syria

- Humanitarians are “very concerned” about the plight of more than 64,000 people living in the restive Al Hol camp in northeast Syria, the UN Spokesperson told journalists on Friday 16 Oct.
- 4 people are reported to have died in Lattakia, with a further 70 people from Lattakia and 9 from Tartous admitted to hospitals suffering from breathing difficulties, as a result of 156 fires were reported in Lattakia (95), Tartous (49) and Homs (12) governorates. Early estimates indicate up to 140,000 people (28,000 households) were affected through destruction of and damage to homes and assets⁶³.
- In August 2020, the humanitarian community tracked about 41,000 IDP movements across Syria, with a thirty percent decrease compared to the previous month. The vast majority of the IDP movements were concentrated in northwest Syria with 88 percent occurring within and between Aleppo and Idlib governorates.
- In August 2020, the humanitarian community recorded about 19,000 spontaneous IDP return movements in different locations across Syria, marking a forty percent decrease in comparison to the previous month. More than 12 thousand of these return movements, amounting to 64 percent, occurred within and between Aleppo and Idlib governorates.

⁶⁰ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

⁶¹ Save the Children, Oct 14, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/surge-deadly-sea-crossings-lebanon-cyprus-economic-crisis-pushes-hundreds-thousands>

⁶² NRC, Oct 16, 2020, <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2020/refugees-face-eviction-in-crisis-hit-lebanon/>

⁶³ OCHA, Oct 11, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/ocha-syria-flash-update-01-humanitarian-impact-wildfires-coastal-areas>



- Some 2.8 million people in need in northwest Syria.⁶⁴

Cyprus

- Save the Children, released a report about the surge of people from Lebanon, making desperate sea journeys to Cyprus.⁶⁵
- Cypriot government makes a deal with Lebanon to return more than 200 refugees illegally entering the country.⁶⁶

5. CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Egypt

- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and patriarch of the See of St. Mark, received at the Papal Headquarters in Cairo, Rev. Paul Nasr, priest of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Qatar, where he presented his Holiness with a report on the service in the Church there.⁶⁷
- Various Christian churches in Egypt issued statements rejecting what is known as "euthanasia" and considered it a matter contrary to the teachings of



His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, October 15, 2020, photo credit: His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

⁶⁴ OCHA, Oct 21, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nw_syria_sitrep21_20201020.pdf

⁶⁵ OCHA, Oct 14, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/surge-deadly-sea-crossings-lebanon-cyprus-economic-crisis-pushes-hundreds-thousands>

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch, Sept 29, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/29/cyprus-asylum-seekers-summarily-returned>

⁶⁷ Akhbarelyom, Oct 15, 2020, <https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/3133834/1>



the Bible and which is a source of the teachings of life and not the teachings of death, affirming that life is a blessing from God for his creation.⁶⁸

- The Anglican Episcopal Foundation started the "Together for the Development of Egypt" project in Minya Governorate, in partnership with a number of charitable societies and youth.

Jordan

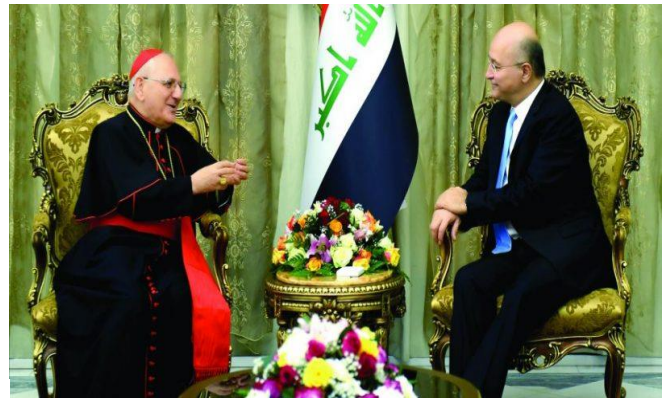
- The Council of Church Heads in Jordan condemned, the insults on religions and acts of violence in all its forms, in response to the events that transpired in France. It also called upon its citizens to preserve the unity of its social fabric so that Jordan can continue to be an example of coexistence to the world.⁶⁹



The Council of Church Heads in Jordan "follows up the unfortunate events that took place in France due to the insult to the Islamic religious symbols.", Oct 26, 2020, photo credit: Al Mamlaka TV

Iraq

- His Beatitude Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, convened with the President of Iraq Barham Salih who stressed on the importance of preserving Christianity in the Middle East and its importance in the region.⁷⁰



His Beatitude Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church with the President of Iraq Barham Salih, Oct 18, 2020, photo credit: iraqakhbar.com

⁶⁸ Dostor, Ohttps://www.dostor.org/3220328

⁶⁹ Roya News, September 30, 2020 https://royanews.tv/news/225671

⁷⁰ Iraq Akhbar, Oct. 18, 2020, https://iraqakhbar.com/2708611



Lebanon

- Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, in the context of the close ties with Cyprus made a phone call to the Archbishop of Chrysostimus II who recently had underwent surgery. HB John X stressed on the fraternal relations that bind him with the archbishop, and the fraternal ties between the Church of Antioch and the Church of Cyprus.
- HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, urged political leaders to stop obstructing talks to form the new government, holding them responsible for the financial crisis and political stalemate in the country.⁷¹
- HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church met papal ambassador to Lebanon, Monsignor Joseph Spitari at the patriarchal headquarters in Rabwah, and discussed with him ecclesiastical, local and regional affairs.⁷²



HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, Oct 13, 2020, photo credit: <https://www.almarkazia.com/>

⁷¹ Middle East Online, Oct 18, 2020, <https://middle-east-online.com/>

⁷² Elnashra, Oct 8, 2020, <https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/1452603/>



Palestine

- HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, warned that Israel is plotting to marginalize Christians in Jerusalem and force them to leave the city.⁷³
- HE Atallah Hanna issued a statement claiming that it is necessary to take vigorous and responsible steps to overcome obstacles to national reconciliation, in defense of the Palestinian cause.⁷⁴



HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, October 14, 2020, photo credit: Alwatan voice.

Syria

- The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, presided over the opening of Farzat Ayoub University Hospital at Al-Hawash University in Wadi Al-Nasara.⁷⁵
- His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church participated in the inauguration of “Dr. Farzat Ayoub University Hospital” at Al-Hawash Private University, visited the construction site of the Lattakia Community Center, celebrated the Holy Qurobo of the



HB Patriarch John X, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, Oct 2, 2020, photo credit: Almarkazia

⁷³ Iqna, Oct 14, 2020, <https://iqna.ir/en/news/3472831/israel-seeking-to-isolate-christians-in-jerusalem-al-quds-%C2%A0>

⁷⁴ Alwatan Voice, Oct 19, 2020, <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2020/10/19/1376131.html>

⁷⁵ Almarkazia, Oct 2, 2020, <https://www.almarkazia.com/ar/news/show/256591>



4th Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Cross at Mor Aphrem Church in Mor Aphrem Monastery in Maarat Saydnaya and received His Excellency Ambassador of Pakistan in Syria General Said Mohammad Khan, at Mor Aphrem Monastery in Maarat Saydnaya.⁷⁶

- During this month, Pope Francis's representative in Syria convened with ambassadors accredited to the Vatican, to raise awareness on the impact of the 8-year war in Syria.⁷⁷

Cyprus

- After the terrible vandalism that struck the church in Mitsero in the Nicosia district, local church leaders demanded the police to step up security around the church and that churches in Cyprus upgrade their security.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/>

⁷⁷ Crux Now, Oct 15, 2020, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-middle-east/2020/10/papal-representative-to-syria-warns-vatican-diplomats-time-is-running-out/>

⁷⁸ Cyprus Mail, October 12, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/10/12/mitsero-community-horrified-by-church-vandalism/>



6. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

The journalist Huguette Salameh, director of the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department highlighted on Télé Lumière and Noursat the council's humanitarian role in the relief of Beirut (October 2020)



Interview with the journalist Huguette Salameh, director of the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department. October 2020, photo credit: MECC website

Télé Lumière - Noursat dedicated a weekly segment for the Middle East Council of Churches every Thursday in "Al Nour Maana" show, to discuss the latest updates regarding the MECC appeal as well its relief and development projects in Beirut.

Last week, the journalist Huguette Salameh, director of the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department, was the guest of the program. During her phone interview, she underlined the "Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counseling" program organized by the Theological and Ecumenical Department, under the supervision of Sr. Emilie Tannous, and which aimed at supporting a group of Lebanese youth spiritually and psychologically after the Beirut explosion. Salameh also highlighted the role that this department is playing in rehabilitating human beings, and mentioned the relief and humanitarian work that the council's Diakonia department is doing.



The Secretary General Dr. Michel Abs welcomed Father Melki with the “Roots Don’t Die” team (October 9, 2020)



Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General, the journalist Huguette Salameh, director of the Communication and Public Relations Department, Father David Melki, the priest of the parish Mar Behnam & Sarah for Syriac Catholic, crew members of the documentary “Roots don’t die”, and the media committee’s team, Johnny Karam, Raffi Sayegh, Leah Adel Meemary and Tony Azar. October 9, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

Dr. Michel Abs, the Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) welcomed at the Council's headquarters in Beirut, the priest of the parish Mar Behnam & Sarah for Syriac Catholic, Father David Melki. Father melki offered Dr. Abs a copy of the documentary “Roots don’t die”, while he was accompanied by a team of the media committee, Johnny Karam, Raffi Sayegh, Leah Adel Meemary and Tony Azar.

After the team offered their gift and congratulated Dr. Abs for his new position as Secretary General for the MECC, Melki explained the reasons that pushed him to prepare this documentary; which studied the Biography of Mor Ephram the Syriac, in coincidence with the Saint's centenary and his declaration as a Saint for the whole church in 1920. He also revealed that the money collected out of this project would go be used to support the school students who are most in need, in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.



Dr. Michel Abis, who welcomed the delegation and congratulated them on the valuable work that preserves pages from the history of the Syriac Catholic Church, wished Father Melki, luck and success in his quest to document the history of his church. He also placed the capacity and energy of the Council especially that of the Communication Department under the disposal of the Syriac Catholic Church; In addition, he supported all projects, which aim to preserve the history of the Christian Orthodox Church and to document it.

The Secretary General Dr. Michel Abs mourns the loss of Georges Hezo (October 13, 2020)



The deceased Georges Jamil Hazou, October 13, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

The secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), Dr. Michel Abs addressed a condolences letter to His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church, and to the family of the deceased Georges Jamil Hazou, and his loved ones:

“With deep sorrow and sadness, we received the news about our brother Georges Hazou passing away. He was a loyal servant to the Church of Christ. His benevolent and loving marks still bear witness to the Ecumenical Christian spirit that crowned his journey in the Department of the Refugees Palestinian Service in the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC).



The Syriac Church will miss him in Jordan and Palestine. Moreover, he was a pioneer and an example of a loyal brother and friend to serve his brothers. The Middle East Council of Churches will also miss such a servant to the church who devoted his life in the service of his Lord.

On behalf of the Middle East Council of Churches, I extend my deepest condolences to your Holiness, to the fathers of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Jordan and Palestine and Georges Hazou's family, especially his wife and daughters. Hoping the Lord Jesus, who redeemed us with His death, will associate him with His resurrection and renew him with heavenly wreaths.

May he Rest in The Peace of Christ. Christ is Risen".

A new batch of relief supplies for the families affected with the Beirut Blast (October 2020)



Diakonia department's team distributed a new batch of relief supplies to the member churches, October 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

In the framework of the last two appeals launched by the Middle East Council of Churches consequently to the Beirut Blast, the Diakonia department's team provided a new batch of relief supplies to presidents in the member church to be distributed to the most vulnerable and damaged families in the Eastern Orthodox, Orthodox, Evangelical and Catholic Churches.



This assistance program was carried out in cooperation and coordination with the International Organization of “Act Alliance”, where the supplies included essential food rations.

Knowing that the Diakonia department is continuing its humanitarian and relief programs to help the stricken Beirut and its people who are suffering from the consequences of 4 August.

Dr. Michel Abs, MECC Secretary General, from Bkerke: What we discussed with His Beatitude Patriarch Al Rahi will form an essential part of our work towards the council’s General Assembly (October 17, 2020)



His Beatitude Mar Bechara Boutros Al Rahi, Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General, Fr. Gabriel Hachem, the Associate Secretary General and director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, Mrs. Huguette Salameh, director of the Communication and Public Relations Department, and Ms. Nina Hallak, coordinator of the Diakonia Department in Beirut. October 17, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.



Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General started his official visits to the council's Presidents to thank them for their confidence in electing him as Secretary General for four years. Therefore, his first visit was to His Beatitude Mar Bechara Boutros Al Rahi at the Patriarchate headquarters in Bkerke. He was accompanied by Fr. Gabriel Hachem, the Associate Secretary General and director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, Mrs. Huguette Salameh, director of the Communication and Public Relations Department, and Ms. Nina Hallak, coordinator of the Diakonia Department in Beirut.

Dr. Abs expressed his gratitude towards His Beatitude Al Rahi for hosting the last Executive Committee meeting on September 18, 2020, and for his readiness to host the council's General Assembly, which will be held next September in Bkerke. In addition, the council's programs, activities of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, and those of the Diakonia Department were presented, as well as the Council's role in promoting unity and cooperation among churches.

At the end of the meeting, Dr. Michel Abs, the Secretary General, declared to the media office in Bkerki: "we received the blessing of His Beatitude Al Rahi to start our new mission. We also discussed matters related to the Eastern Christian challenges, the Christian presence in the Middle East and the MECC role in strengthening this presence. We also raised various other important problems". Abs described the fruitful meeting, and added: "what we proposed to His Beatitude will form an essential part of our discussions and work in the next step, especially in preparing for the General Assembly, which will be an expanded spiritual summit".



Dr. Michel Abs, MECC's SG participates in an Ecumenical Prayer (October 24, 2020)



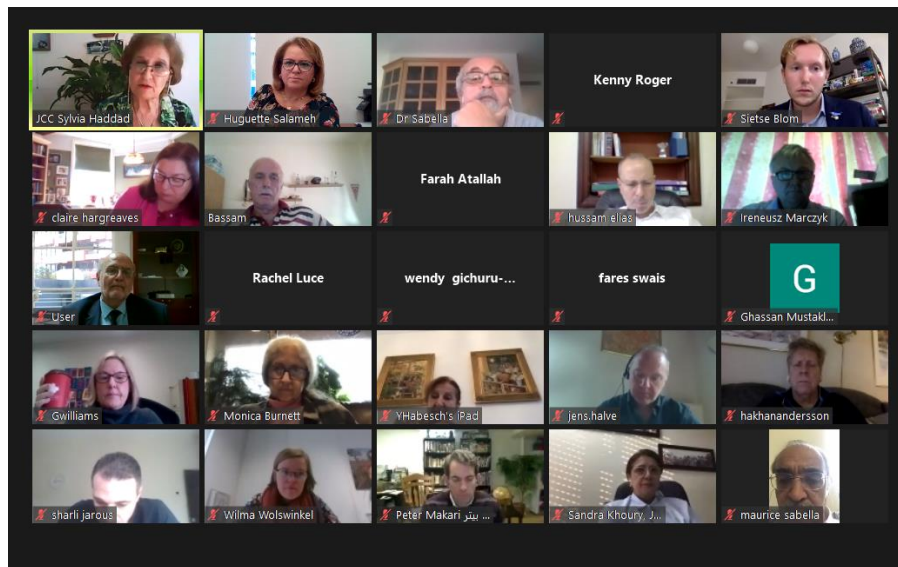
Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General, October 24, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.



Dr. Michel Abs, the #MECC Secretary General, participated in an Ecumenical Prayer at the Chaldean Archdiocese in Beirut on the occasion of the Archangel Raphael's feast. The mass was attended by Archbishop Daniel Koria, Charles Mourad, George Asadurian, George Baconi, and the fathers Yatran Guliana, Nektarios Khairallah, Roni Matouk, Charbel Behi, in addition to Monsignor Raphael Traboulsi and Father Youssef Khaled, of the Council.



Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General, in a first acquaintance meeting with the DSPR team (October 28, 2020)



Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General, during the acquaintance meeting with the DSPR team, October 24, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General, participated in a virtual acquaintance meeting organized by the council's department for the service of Palestinian refugees (DSPR), during which he presented his plan of work for the next four years, amidst the challenges that the Council is facing today.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Bernard Sabella, the department's director, its executive directors in the various Palestinian cities, and the journalist Huguette Salameh, the director of the MECC Communication and Public Relations department.

The participants exchanged with Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC Secretary General, how they are facing the Coronavirus pandemic, the challenges that it imposed, and the achievements that they were able to implement. They also interchanged experiences and ideas in order to develop their technologies and increase their productivity. The meeting ended with an interaction between the participants, especially the international partners, and Dr. Michel Abs.



In a follow-up to the consequences of Beirut Blast disaster The Middle East Council of Churches continues to sow hope (October 2020)



Diakonia Department's team distributes a new batch of relief supplies, October, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

A lady affected by the Beirut Blast, said in confused and bittersweet tears while receiving a box of aid offered by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) “I did not expect to receive cleaning products that would last me for 3 to 4 months, especially that I was not capable of, buying them myself”.

In fact, since 4 August, this lady's tears have been burning. She described the pain and despair that are dominating Beirut's people who, without individual initiatives and assistance of churches and civil societies, would have been neither helped nor supported in these tragic and brutal circumstances.

These are the circumstances of all of those who have been affected by the Beirut Blast, whether financially, morally or psychologically, they are all waiting for a glimmer of hope to rise from underneath the rubble and the dust.

The Beirut earthquake represented a fatal blow that destroyed their lives amid already existing difficult living conditions. Organizations and associations stood by the people to help them and support them since they will not be able to face the consequences of this tragedy on their own.



The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) which launched the two appeals to save the destroyed city and its suffering people, also called to form an Ecumenical committee consisting of a team from each department, with representatives of the church members, Eastern Orthodox, Orthodox, Evangelical and Catholic to coordinate together to identify the citizens' needs and fairly distribute aid.

Father Nicolas Abboudi, a member of the Ecumenical Committee from the Catholic family and the intendent of the Melkite Greek Catholic Arch eparchy of Beirut and Byblos said: "through this ecumenical work we are able to be a united church to help all people and to make them feel that they have someone to support them". With these sincere feelings, Father Abboudi expressed his hope regarding the work done by the Council and the support of all churches united that can bring back hope to the people who are suffering under the weight of the calamity.

The council's international partners chose to support the Council by giving hope to the afflicted, and they rushed to answer the Council's appeal. Reverend Rima Nassrallah added: "People lost hope, and with our support they will be able to see a glimmer of light. The churches and religious institutions are trying to provide this light, this way we encourage each to strengthen our faith and live with greater hope".

In order to fulfill this role and support, the Council's service and relief service Diakonia has cooperated with several international organizations such as "Act Alliance", "NCA", "Tearfund", "CAFOD" and others; where they continue their initiatives to provide assistance to the affected people on various levels, such as food rations, cleaning and hygiene products, as well as providing mattresses, pillows, winter covers and even cash assistance.

In this context, the Diakonia department continues its tour in the field to deliver a new batch of aid packages to the officials in the member churches to be distributed to the biggest number of the most vulnerable families in different regions in destroyed Beirut and its suburbs. But the needs of the Lebanese are increasing every day, especially as the economic, social and health crises have worsened. Soon, they won't be able to secure medicines, household appliances, and even pay for schools. However, prayer remains the only source of strength in these difficult circumstances. As for the director of the Armenian Evangelical Social Action Committee, Ms. Lena Dagulian, hoped that "we will be free from these tragic circumstances as soon as possible", she later on added "I pray for peace and stability and God will lead us on the right path".

In addition, the Middle East Council of Churches and Tearfund launched the cash assistance project, which will be launched in Bourj Hammoud area, taking into consideration that about 40% of the homes in the region have suffered minor damages and that their residents are already suffering from extreme poverty before the explosion. The Middle East Council of Churches is keen to help all those affected by in order to reestablish their hope and strength and to be able to live in dignity. Knowing that the Council continues its

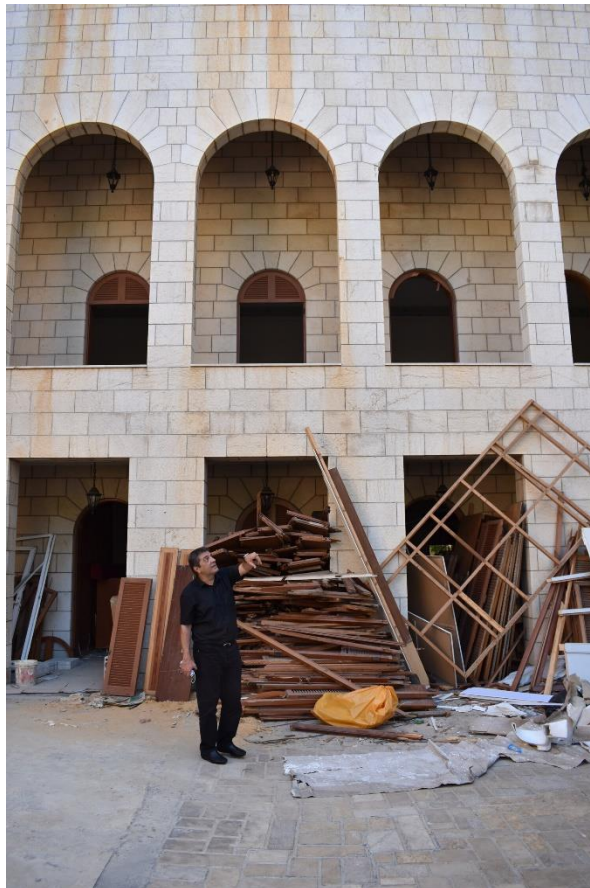


humanitarian and relief mission in various countries ever since it was founded in 1974. Today, the Council continues to receive relief assistance to Beirut through the following appeals:

[The Middle East Council of Churches' Statement to the Churches of the World and to Its Partners, Support to the devastated city of Beirut and to its distressed people](#)

[MECC Beirut Appeal in Response to Port Explosion on August 4, 2020 \(Phase 1\)](#)

From Maronite Archdiocese in destroyed Beirut Father Gabriel Tabet: We are working on sowing hope and trust, because God will never leave us! (October 2020)



Father Gabriel Tabet, the servant of the St. John Church in Achrafieh and a member of the Ecumenical Committee to relief Beirut in the affected Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut, October 2020, photo credit: MECC website.



Winter is coming, the economic crisis is getting worse and worse, the spread of the Corona virus is increasing horribly and Beirut's citizens are still suffering from their bleeding wounds.

Over 60 days have passed on the catastrophe that hit Beirut, and huge damages still linger on whereas Lebanese people are exhausted from trying to survive while facing an unknown fate. Who will save them from this disaster that ruined their lives and destroyed their future?

Associations, diocese and church institutions are continuing with their humanitarian work despite of their inability to meet the essential needs of all those who are affected. Moreover, communication and collaboration between the concerned humanitarians are two essential indicators for the sustainability of this mission especially with the complete and total absence of the government.

Hence, the Middle East Council of Churches called to form an Ecumenical Committee that includes a team from various Departments from the Council, in addition to representatives for the member churches in Beirut. Aiming to organize and harmonize the tasks while following up on the relief process to be able to reach the wider range possible of affected people. This humanitarian common job was established due to the appeals sent by the Council consequent to the explosion.

Within this context, our team from the Communication and Public Relations Department will each week roam the destroyed regions of Beirut to shed the light on the damages that befell the churches in Beirut and the dioses people from various church families. Therefore, the team members will be attempting to identify their urgent needs and finding ways to help.

The first visit was to the Maronite Archdiocese in Achrafieh.

Father Gabriel Tabet, the servant of the St. John Church in Achrafieh and a member of the Ecumenical Committee to relief Beirut, welcomed us in the Maronite Archdiocese in Beirut where the operation of removing the rubble caused by the blast is still in progress since the Archdiocese building, the Sagesse school and the vocational school were destroyed.

Together, we recalled moments of the panic they went through during the blast that took place while he was celebrating mass with his diocese. Like other Lebanese people, he fell under the trauma, which was reflected in the first moments of panic and before scenes of mass destructions. Father Tabet said "No one knew what was going on" while he described the fright that the citizens of Beirut and its suburbs went through. After checking all the damage that took place in the church and the diocese building, everyone who was present headed to the streets of Achrafieh to aid the wounded and injured.

Father Tabet continued by informing us of the material damage the Archdiocese underwent, which was estimated approximately at \$1 million, in addition to the number of injured priests and lay people. He



went on to say that the 9 churches in Achrafieh were hit badly: St. Antonios Church, St. Maroun Church, St. Joseph Church and the St. Georges Cathedral.

Father Tabet is worried about the wellbeing of the families whose houses are still in ruins and of those who were destroyed and need to be rebuilt. At the same time, he is armed with his faith in the will of Beirut's citizens and their adherence to their city and their roots; most importantly, he counts on it, for Beirut to prevail and to remain the city of faith, love, life and openness.

After the blast, the Archdiocese distributed hot meals to the families who were robbed of their houses and who were ridded of their belongings. They also set tents in front of the churches to welcome them and support them. In addition, several groups visited the houses to inspect the damage and needs of its residents; up until the Archdiocese launched the campaign "Tachajaa" which means "Have Courage" to raise donations to alleviate pain and despair, which is dominating in the Beirut Citizens due to the recklessness and negligence of the government that didn't come to their aid. This is where Father Tabet explained that the meaning of the campaign "Tachajaa" is to confirm that God is consoling us with his Holy Spirit, and that he is our sole source of strength. He also praised the volunteers who rushed in great numbers from various Lebanese regions to relief their capital, stand by their brothers, and support them.

With limited potential and despite economic hardship, the Archdiocese was able to reconstruct a thousand homes and to insure the necessities of daily life to all its residents through the statistics it made. They were able to finish 800 houses until today. He also added that the Archdiocese is distributing food rations received from several organizations, such as the Middle East Council of Churches, to the most vulnerable and damaged families, noting that the critical need also lies in the cleanliness tools, which prices increased terribly, as it is for other supplies. He praised the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity among the region's citizens, as many of them shared the food rations among each other.

The Archdiocese is still cooperating with the Lebanese army's emergence room that is based in Beirut, which is working on coordinating between the organizations to be able to fairly distribute aid to all those affected; in collaboration with the organization of "Uniting for Lebanon" that include 90 active members in the field. He also referred to coordination with the Ecumenical Committee, which was launched by the Middle East Council of Churches, where all injured are being helped equally without any discrimination. He also called for cooperation and collaboration between churches and parishes and between Christians in general, saying, "We are working on sowing hope and trust, because God will never leave us!"

The Beirut blast is past its third months and in a very difficult political, economic and social stage. The Lebanese are drowning in unfortunate living conditions while the responsible are concerned with their interests and deals. Moreover, the immigration rate is increasing constantly and the Beirut Christians are standing between two choices: either to leave their wounded country or to face extreme poverty. Had not



been for the initiatives of the international community and some governmental associations and organizations, Beirut would still be bleeding. The capital remains, until today seriously injured. But despite of all these tragedies, prayer remains the only way to gain strength and hope, "The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen." (Matthew 4:16).

Communication and Public Relations Department

Fr. Charbel Bahi, representing the Syriac Orthodox Church in the wounded Beirut: We urgently need to be united as Christians while working together and showing Christianity through our deeds (October, 2020)



Fr. Charbel Bahi, a member of the Ecumenical Committee for the relief of Beirut representing the Syriac Orthodox Church and designated by His Excellency Daniel Kourieh, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Beirut, October, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.



In the wake of the Beirut Blast, the churches families and their affiliated institutions rushed to save their affected, to calm their pain and heal their wounds, which are now eternal. In cooperation with local and international humanitarian organizations, such as the Middle East Council of Churches – Diakonia Department, Beirut's dioceses and archdioceses continue their efforts to support those who have been affected psychologically, morally and financially; especially as they drown in an endless cycle of suffocating crises and will not be able to get out of it easily.

The Syriac Orthodox Church's families in Beirut have also been victims of this sorrowful tragedy that paralyzed their hearts and shook the whole world. How did the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut respond to this disaster? How did it support the affected people?

The team of the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department contacted Fr. Charbel Bahi, a member of the Ecumenical Committee for the relief of Beirut - which was created by MECC - representing the Syriac Orthodox Church and designated by His Excellency Daniel Kourieh, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Beirut, to shed the light on the severe damages and losses by the Syriac families, to identify their urgent needs and to find ways to help.

In a troubled state, Fr. Charbel Bahi described the first moments of terror and panic that he went through after the blast, like the other Lebanese people, and told us that they all fell under the trauma passing through difficult and sad times. Father Bahi added that, in a first step, he sent messages, to all the believers in his parish in Musaytbeh region and to the Syriac Orthodox families in Achrafieh, after being asked by Bishop Daniel Kourieh. So he checked up on them and on their loved ones, to inspect their losses and extend a helping hand. He also called on every person who can help and visit the affected families and support them, according to the circumstances they faced.

Fr. Charbel continued by informing us that he accompanied His Excellency Bishop Kourieh in a field tour, three days after the disaster, and visited the houses of all the parish's families to inspect the damages they faced and the losses. In addition, they promised that they will always help them, as the Church embraces them and will never leave them. Father Bahi added that affected families are also facing the difficult repercussions of the Port blast and the worsening economic crisis, noting that the needs are becoming dire at all levels and for all the Lebanese.

With a great hope, Fr. Bahi described the disaster relief operation the Archdiocese is doing in the wounded Beirut. They were able to provide financial aid, reaching approximately the amount of \$ 3,000, as compensation to the families whose houses have been severely damaged. Medically, they paid the fees of the surgical operations the injured people underwent, as a result of the blast, especially that the prices of the hospitals' services are constantly increasing. Moreover, the diocese continues to support about 110 families since the occurrence of the tragedy by providing monthly food rations, and even amounts of



money that enable them to purchase their basic daily needs. Hence, Bahi praised the initiatives of the Syriac charitable organizations, the eparchies of the Syriac Church and the generous people in Europe who decided to rescue their suffering brothers in Beirut. Hadn't it been for these aid, the Archdiocese could not be able to continue its relief operation.

In this context, Fr. Charbel Bahi praised the cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches, through the Ecumenical Committee for the relief of Beirut, and expressed his hope for this common humanitarian work among all churches; thanking the council for its continuous efforts in providing relief to the Lebanese people in general and to the Christians in particular, through providing various types of aid. Thus, he said: "we thank our Lord for you and for all your efforts, as you are working to unite the churches and to provide aid to everyone without any distinction", adding, "you are standing beside us during this difficult crisis, and we urgently need to be united as Christians working together and showing Christianity through our deeds".

Amidst these difficult and tragic living conditions that the Lebanese are going through, cooperation and mutual support remain essential indicators in facing the repercussions of the 4th of August disaster. Essentials needs are increasing day by day, and the citizens are exhausted unable to secure the necessities of daily life, and even to rehabilitate their homes, most of which are not eligible for safe accommodation. Therefore, donation campaigns are still ongoing locally and internationally to rescue the struggling Lebanese people, "O God, who will roll away the stone from the heart of the wounded Beirut and its affected citizens" (From the MECC Beirut Appeal in response to the Port explosion).

Communication and Public Relations Department



His Excellency Archbishop Georges Assadourian: The Patriarchate pledged to restore 200 houses in the stricken Beirut (October, 2020)



His Excellency Archbishop Georges Assadourian, Patriarchal Vicar of the Armenian Catholic Church, and member of the Ecumenical Committee for the relief of Beirut representing the Syriac Orthodox Church and designated by His Excellency Daniel Kourieh, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Beirut, October, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

The moment the explosion took place in the port of Beirut he was heading to the Patriarchate in Achrafieh – Jeitawi. In less than seconds, the Archbishop started transporting wounded people to the hospital with his car!

His Excellency Archbishop Georges Assadourian, Patriarchal Vicar of the Armenian Catholic Church narrates the tragic hours that followed the blast and what came with it of tragedy, misery and sorrow that tore Beirut citizens, the Lebanese people and everyone who loves Lebanon across the world.

He discussed rehabilitating the houses and the people, the Beirut appeal, the Catholic Armenian Church's needs. This interview took place in his office in the Patriarchate in Achrafieh that is also highly damaged.



Approximately 3 months after the blast, Archbishop Assadourian says: "I found myself running in streets and hospitals searching for my wounded friends, family members and children of my diocese. I kept on helping in the hospital until around 3 am. I swept the glass and removed rubble; I also helped in cleaning parking lots that became a space to receive hundreds of injured and wounded people. I even received a call from the United States asking me to save an old lady stuck on the balcony of a Hospital because of the severity of the Blast.

The children of the diocese and the Achrafieh region specifically, know his Excellency since 1987, during wartime, where he used to serve his diocese; he even prepared a small truck to pick up garbage and to distribute gas, water and hot meals.

Assadourian continued "We, as the Armenian Church we have a lot of faith in our children, they are always ready to support the weakest. The genocide that took place against Armenians united us. This is how we were raised, Armenian are always in solidarity no matter where they are. The proof is what is happening today in the war against karabakh where all Armenian people are united to defend their homeland and brothers and to support in all ways possible."

Later on Assadourian spoke about the relief operation to the affected Beirut citizens and he reveals that the patriarchate took it upon itself to restore 200 houses of the diocese that were destroyed by the blast.

As of the first day, we headed towards the destroyed streets and we visited the people to at least help restore their doors and main entrances, in order for the families to be able to sleep safely away from robbery and danger.

This is in addition to the churches that were greatly damaged, including the Grand Cathedral in Al-Dabbas square in Beirut, the headquarters of the Patriarchate in Achrafieh, the churches of Bourj Hamoud and Zalka. The restoration of those churches will be postponed until after the restoration of the houses of the families before winter comes".

He continues, "Since the beginning of the economic crisis, almost since last Christmas, we started offering a daily lunch for about 200 families. We cook and distribute the meals in Bourj Hammoud and the areas around it. We also distribute food rations, once a month to approximately 850 families. We lack medicines, especially in the exceptional circumstances imposed by the coronavirus pandemic and the elderly who do not have any financial support. This is where we find it important to intervene to provide treatment and sometimes we try to secure access to hospitals.

We always thank God for his blessing, we have a greater blessing today embodied by the solidarity between the Churches of Beirut and the Middle East Council of Churches, which was organized by creating



an Ecumenical Committee for the relief of Beirut, and I had the honor to join this committee with my church.

The tragedy of the port caused a lot of pain, but we thank God that it united people and it ignited the flame of charity between them.”

Assadourian also added, regarding the suffering of the Middle Eastern people and the price they pay each time to stay in their Homeland “We are invited to be witnesses in this East, and to be witnesses to the inevitability of the Christian presence. Therefore, our presence as Armenian people in Lebanon is the foundation of our existence and future, so we stress the importance of youth presence in Lebanon and we try to prove to them that “there is no place better than Lebanon” and they will realize that when they experience living abroad, where they will find human values, but on the other hand there is a painful absence of religious and spiritual values. These spiritual values are the message of the Church in Lebanon, where we are witnessing to the world what it means to be Christians.

And you as the Middle East Council of Churches, you gather Christian families and you prove to everyone that our solidarity strengthens the hope in the hearts of the Middle Eastern Christians and it confirms that serving others is the source of happiness and peace for the families you are helping.

The Lord works through you, and with you, he says to our brothers and sisters, “the Church and the Council of Churches are gathered, to take care of you, to help you, and to rehabilitate your homes. Many of those who received food rations considered as consolation in the name of Christ. You are working in the name of Christ, who gave you the grace, to work and sow hope. Moreover, the problem is not when we fall down, but it is when we are not striving to rise again”.

Regarding the most important necessities, he expects that the citizens will need in the future, His Excellency Archbishop Assadourian concludes, “today people need all kinds of assistance, and we hope that they will be helped, especially in the restoration of their houses that were damaged by the Beirut blast. We notice that what is also important is securing education for our children, so His Beatitude Patriarch Gregoire Gabroyan decided to insure 2/3 of the tuition fees in our schools. We cannot allow our children to go to non-Armenian schools in which they lose their Armenian language and their spiritual and religious values that we are keen on raising them on.

However, our schools are facing difficulties coping with the current economic crisis, so we decided to collect donations for the 2020-2021 academic year. It is prohibited that our children do not go to school or attend online courses”.

Communication and Public Relations Department



The Middle East Council of Churches: Violence is a crime against God and humanity... Religions are a message of love and peace (30 October 2020)



Nice Cathedral. October, 2020, Photo: Sébastien Botella/ Nice Matin

In a communiqué today, The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) condemned the abominable crime that took place in France in the last few days, and declared that “violence is a crime against God and humanity, so how would it be if it is justified by religious faith, against the teachings of all religions that is love, peace, solidarity and the admittance of the right of diversity and interaction while considering diversity as a rich cultural heritage”.

MECC also added, “We were outraged, and so was the entire world, with the resurgence of the hate speech, the persistence on spreading fear and the perpetration of terrible massacres against innocent people, an act that is incompatible with the doctrines of religions, law as well as the moral obligation to safeguard the freedom of beliefs linked to the freedom of conscience; This requires that the entire world, with its religious, political, academic, media and educational leaderships, reinforces the confrontation with terrorism and extremism; This requires too that the trend of dialog, love and moderation governs. In addition to that, the world is invited to adopt moderation in religious practice, based on human dignity where inclusive citizenship triumphs over exclusion, isolation and abolition.”

Furthermore, MECC confirmed its continuous exchange with its partners across the globe, at the local, regional or international levels, in order to deeply reflect on coordination in the mechanisms of



condemning terrorism and extremism in all its forms, and to make the spirit of Human Brotherhood and common living prevail.

In conclusion, MECC called to “Reject the hate speech, to refuse all forms of violence and to persist in raising the level of alert in confronting these hate speeches and violence logic in addition to increasing awareness campaigns in educational curricula, on social media and in the religious guidance which will prevent conflict. This requires the formation of local, regional and international committees that tackle the subject of general preventive and proactive public policies against religious violence instead of being satisfied with simply condemning reactions.”

Communication and Public Relations Department

7. MECC Humanitarian activities October 2020

Lebanon

- Distributed 600 Food Kits, 600 Hygiene Kits, 430 Dignity Kits, 565 Mattresses Kit, 565 Linen Kits in various areas of Lebanon through MECC member churches to beneficiaries affected by the Beirut explosion.
- Delivered awareness sessions on COVID-19 and mental health for 90 women (30 Syrian and 60 Lebanese).
- Continued distribution of medication particularly to elderly with chronic illnesses who rely on the latter at the end of every month.
- Continued partial cure to cancer patients through purchasing of medication and cycle treatments.
- Completed 13 sessions in psychosocial support and GBV awareness for 29 women.
- Completed 6 sessions in psychosocial support and trauma care for 6 children.
- Completed 10 sessions for 15 Lebanese women on soap production (capacity building/ women empowerment).
- Completed a soft skills training session for 12 women in the form of painting on wood.
- Completed a further 60 hours out of a 120-hour course training in Home Care for the elderly and first aid in cooperation with St. George Hospital University Medical center.



Dignity kit and NFI distribution, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia





Food basket and home care training session, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Home Care and distribution. Oct 2020. photo credit Diakonia.



Life Skills training Session and NCA (Norwegian Church Aid) and RFF(Rapid Response Fund) distribution, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Soap making session, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia



Soft skills session and Voucher Distribution, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.





Syria

- Continued health project to provide medication for cancer patients.
- Continued waste management activities in Izraa and Sheikh Maskin by hiring 110 workers under cash for work project.
- Completed health awareness sessions and distribution of hygiene kits to 1000 HH in Mesmiyeh in Daraa.
- Continued remedial classes courses for 175 students in Aleppo, 382 in Damascus rural.
- Completed the first payment of tuition fees support for 270 students in several governorates.
- Continued vocational training for 120 youth in Daraa governorates.
- Continued business startup course for 180 skilled workers in Daraa governorates.
- Completed the registration of beneficiaries in Ghabagheb and As-Sanamayn in Daraa governorate to benefit from distribution of laying hens, fodder, coops and vet services.
- Completed the distribution of additional 41 food baskets in Aleppo.
- Completed health awareness session training for 20 women in Daraa including the distribution of blood pressure devices.
- Launched HP activities combined the distribution of school and hygiene kits for 3225 students in Damascus rural, Homs and Aleppo.
- Launched new cash for work activities in cooperation with two implementing churches in Damascus rural and Homs.
- Launched business startup course combined with distribution of startup kits for 50 beneficiaries in Aleppo in cooperation with local implementing church.



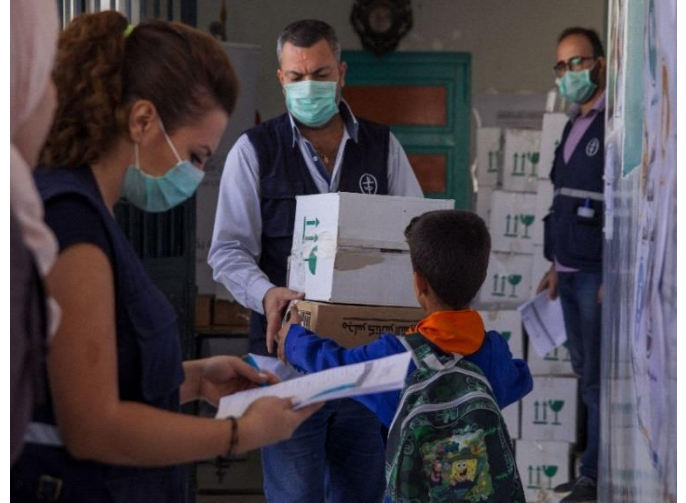
Medication for cancer patients, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Waste management activities in Izraa and Sheikh Maskin, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia



Tuition fees support for 270 students, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Distribution of school and hygiene kits in Damascus, Oct 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.

8. CONCLUSION

While the world continues to tear itself apart, faith based organizations such as the council, are continuously trying alleviating the symptoms of the clash. However, our resources are limited and our calls for peace fall on deaf ears of those who retain power. Once again, we reiterate the region needs a policy shift that would guarantee that all people of different backgrounds, be included within a non-sectarian system. We need a paradigm shift, which would move the region and the world from confrontation to coming together in brotherly love for one another.