



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط  
The Middle East Council of Churches

# Middle East Overview – April 2020

## The month of human solidarity against the Coronavirus



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط  
The Middle East Council of Churches



نداءً تضامناً  
ومحبة

A call for  
Solidarity  
and Love

*A Call for Solidarity and Love, Pages 28 and 29, April 22, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC Website*

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## 1- BACKGROUND

While most of the world is still under lockdown, there can be no doubt that glimmers of hope are surfacing. Covid-19, the pandemic virus that has paralyzed worldwide economies and ways of life, has finally started to recede in terms of its infectivity and mortality rate. If it weren't for the tenacity of the human spirit to persist, the labor of our medical professionals, the unity of our international community, and of course, our collective prayers, the virus would have been considered an unbeatable foe. As throughout most of the world, lockdown is being slowly and gradually lifted, we thank God for his constant oversight.

During this month, MECC's staff continued to work diligently from home, attempting to boost morale and hope using its social media outlets, while also tending to those in need -although with limited means.



## 2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

### Egypt

- Egyptian Finance Minister Mohammad Maait in April revealed that 8.5 billion USD in foreign investments in government debt instruments have left the country during the last three months.<sup>1</sup>
- The International Finance Corporation, which had financed 8 billion USD to businesses hit globally, issued a statement that it will stand ready to assist Egypt.<sup>2</sup>
- Egypt announced that it will allocate 20 billion Egyptian pounds to support stock exchange amid the corona pandemic.<sup>3</sup>
- Egypt's urban consumer inflation fell to 5.1% in March, although prices kept increasing on a 3-month basis.<sup>4</sup>
- Egypt resumed the construction of all massive projects despite the threat of the virus.<sup>5</sup>
- Under the instruction of the Egyptian President, Egypt is set to import over 800,000 tons of wheat to boost reserves of strategic commodities.<sup>6</sup>
- 15.6986 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.<sup>7</sup>

### Jordan

- The Jordanian government declared a 48-hour curfew in response to covid-19.<sup>8</sup>
- A policy paper to support the efforts of the government to form a plan to protect Jordan's national economy for the post-coronavirus period, was approved.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 10, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200410-egypt-8-5-billion-in-foreign-investment-left-country-in-3-months/>

<sup>2</sup> Ahram, April 9, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/366942/Business/Economy/INTERVIEW-IFC-stands-by-Egypt-to-mitigate-the-econ.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Arab News, March 24, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1645336/business-economy>

<sup>4</sup> Arab News, April 10, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1655931/business-economy>

<sup>5</sup> The National, April 6, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/egypt-s-construction-workers-return-to-sites-in-balancing-act-between-deadly-virus-and-tanking-economy-1.1002429>

<sup>6</sup> Ahram, April 9, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/366980/Business/Economy/Egypt-to-import--tonnes-of-wheat-during-harvest-F.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cbe.org.eg/en/EconomicResearch/Statistics/Pages/ExchangeRatesListing.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Aawsat, April 8, 2020, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2223766/jordan-declares-48-hour-curfew-concern-over-virus-impact-economy>

<sup>9</sup> Jordan Times, April 6, 2020, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/lower-house-jef-policy-paper-presents-measures-strengthen-economy-post-coronavirus-crisis>



- The International Monetary Fund declared that it has approved a four-year, \$1.3 billion loan program for Jordan.<sup>10</sup>
- The Jordanian government in response to the covid-19 threat convened with representatives of the IMF, to adjust some of the objectives of the four-year structural reforms program.<sup>11</sup>
- Mohamad Al-Ississ, Minister of Finance, declared in a televised interview that the virus has decreased Jordan's ability to generate revenues. However, he assured that the country will be able to fulfill its debts.<sup>12</sup>
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.<sup>13</sup>

## Iraq

- Due to the oil price's collapse, Iraq's Prime Minister designate warned that the country may not be able to pay May's public sector salaries.<sup>14</sup>
- Sherwan Mirza, a Kurdish lawmaker and a member of the Iraqi parliament's finance committee, claimed that the country can weather the current economic challenges for a period of 6 to 12 months by relying on its substantial foreign reserves which amounts to 70 billion USD.<sup>15</sup>
- Iraq's Prime Minister-designate Mustafa Kadhimi met with top members of the outgoing government on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April in an attempt form a new cabinet, as quickly as possible, to react to the internal and external crises.<sup>16</sup>
- To cope with the oil price crash, Iraq's economic parliamentary committee proposed to use crude oil instead of cash and to cut unnecessary costs.<sup>17</sup>
- According to the economic and finance adviser to Iraq's Prime Minister, Iraq asked the IMF for debt deferment due to coronavirus crisis.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Reuters, March 26, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-jordan-imf/imf-approves-1-3-billion-loan-for-jordan-adjusts-for-coronavirus-expenses-idUSKBN21D03F>

<sup>11</sup> NY Times, April 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/04/07/world/middleeast/07reuters-health-coronavirus-jordan-imf.html>

<sup>12</sup> Reuters, April 8, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-jordan-economy/jordan-says-coronavirus-will-leave-deep-negative-impact-on-its-finances-idUSL5N2BW08V>

<sup>13</sup> <http://statisticaldb.cbj.gov.jo/index?action=level4>

<sup>14</sup> Financial Times, April 8, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/3afc240b-2a3d-49df-b3c5-f5427222a5d9>

<sup>15</sup> Rudaw, March 28, 2020, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/business/28032020>

<sup>16</sup> Voice of America News, April 11, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/iraqs-pm-designate-scrambles-assemble-cabinet>

<sup>17</sup> SP Global, April 2, 2020, <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/040220-iraqi-parliamentary-committee-recommends-oil-companies-get-paid-with-crude-rather-than-cash>

<sup>18</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 16, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200416-iraq-asks-imf-for-debt-deferment-due-to-coronavirus-crisis/>



- Fitch revised its assessment for Iraq's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating and lowered its rating from stable to negative (B-).<sup>19</sup>
- The United States committed 25.6 million USD to Iraq as part of its global response plan to fight coronavirus.<sup>20</sup>
- 1,193.59 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.<sup>21</sup>

## Lebanon

- Lebanon launched formal debt restructuring talks to implement an economic turnaround plan by the end of the year, by earmarking \$57 billion domestic T-bills and bonds for restructuring. Also, over \$2 billion of bilateral and multilateral debt will remain untouched.<sup>22</sup>
- The International Monetary Fund predicted that Lebanon's economy will shrink by 12% over the coming year.<sup>23</sup>
- The well-renowned "Le Bristol" hotel closed due to economic woes.<sup>24</sup>
- The exchange rate of the dollar reached a new record, amounting to 3250 LL among exchangers. The rate is expected to gradually increase.<sup>25</sup>
- After shutting down the airport, the government started organizing flights for expats abroad Lebanon.<sup>26</sup>
- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Fitch Ratings, April 16, 2020, <https://www.fitchratings.com/research/sovereigns/fitch-revises-outlook-on-iraq-to-negative-affirms-at-b-16-04-2020>

<sup>20</sup> NRT TV, March 17, 2020, <http://www.nrttv.com/en/News.aspx?id=20751&MapID=2>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.cbiraq.org/DataValues.aspx?dtFrm=10/31/2003&dtTo=02/18/2019&tMId=175&dtformat=MMM,yyyy>

<sup>22</sup> Aawsat, March 27, 2020, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2202906/lebanon-vows-total-economic-overhaul-year-end-amid-debt-talk-kick>

<sup>23</sup> Naharnet, April 15, 2020, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/271038-lebanon-economy-to-shrink-by-massive-12-this-year>

<sup>24</sup> Middle East Eye, April 19, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/landmark-lebanon-hotel-closes-over-economic-crisis-coronavirus>

<sup>25</sup> Arab News, April 18, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1661106/business-economy>

<sup>26</sup> Naharnet, April 9, 2020, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/270939>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>



## Palestine

- Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh warned that to fight the corona virus outbreak, 137 million USD will be needed as it is estimated that the losses across all sectors is 3.8 billion dollars.<sup>28</sup>
- The European Union announced that it will allocate an assistance package of around 71 million USD to help Palestinians fight covid-19.<sup>29</sup>
- The Palestinian Health Ministry claimed that the Gaza Strip lacks coronavirus detection kits, making it harder to fight the outbreak.<sup>30</sup>

## Syria

- United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Monday Apr 6<sup>th</sup>, Parties to Syria's brutal civil war, failed to abide by their obligations under international law to avoid attacks on hospitals and other civilian facilities.<sup>31</sup>
- The European Union announced its readiness to impose stricter sanctions on high-level Syrian regime officials and scientists who were involved in using chemical weapons against civilians.<sup>32</sup>
- The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi attempted to convince Assad by offering \$3 billion to break the Idlib ceasefire as part of an elaborate plot to tie Turkey down in the area.<sup>33</sup>
- The bloc's 22 Arab nations discussed the dangerous consequences of the spread of the virus among refugees and asylum seekers, and the importance of an Idlib cease-fire agreement to prevent the military escalation in the region.<sup>34</sup>
- The Attacks by the Islamic State on gas and oil fields have highlighted the fragility of the security situation in central Syria and the difficulty the government faces in securing a stable stream of energy supplies.<sup>35</sup>
- The Syrian government began selling subsidized bread through its smart card system on April 15 in Damascus and its countryside.

<sup>28</sup> Wafa, April 9, 2020, <http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=hzpWBda115724599023ahzpWBD>

<sup>29</sup> Mena Fn, April 11, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100005986/EU-supports-the-Palestinians-with-a-71-million-in-response-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

<sup>30</sup> Anadolu Agency, April 9, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/gaza-running-short-of-tools-for-diagnosing-covid-19/1797942>

<sup>31</sup> UN, April 6, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061192>

<sup>32</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 9, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200409-eu-mulls-further-sanctions-on-syrian-regime/>

<sup>33</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 8, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/abu-dhabi-crown-prince-mbz-assad-break-idlib-turkey-ceasefire>

<sup>34</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 15, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200415-arab-league-warns-of-virus-risk-in-syria-refugee-camps/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.syria-report.com/news/16>



- The Turkish military and its Syrian proxies shelled On April 10th, Kurdish-held areas in the northern countryside of Aleppo escalating the situation in the region.<sup>36</sup>
- Official Current Exchange Rate SP/USD: 434 - SP/USD-  
Current Exchange Rate in Black Market: 1285 - SP/USD

## Cyprus

- According to Finance Minister Constantinos Petrides, the economy is going to contract by 5% in 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak.<sup>37</sup>
- Hellenic Bank's chief economist Andreas Assiotis warned that the virus is forcing Cyprus to lose 660 million euros a month.<sup>38</sup>
- Fitch Ratings revised the Outlook on Cyprus's Long-Term Foreign-Currency from positive to stable (BBB).<sup>39</sup>
- During April, the Central Bank of Cyprus released an additional 90 million euros to support the economy and give institutions the means to hold additional capital buffers.<sup>40</sup>
- 1. 086 USD Euro official currency value<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> South Front, April 10, 2020, <https://southfront.org/intense-turkish-shelling-targets-kurdish-held-areas-in-northern-aleppo/>

<sup>37</sup> Financial Mirror, March 31, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/03/31/covid19-cyprus-economy-heading-for-recession/>

<sup>38</sup> Ekathimerini, April 10, 2020, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/251544/article/ekathimerini/business/covid-19-costing-cyprus-22-mln-euros-a-day>

<sup>39</sup> Fitch ratings, April 3, 2020, <https://www.fitchratings.com/research/sovereigns/fitch-revises-cyprus-outlook-to-stable-affirms-at-bbb-03-04-2020>

<sup>40</sup> Cyprus Mail, April 10, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/10/cbc-releases-further-e90m-to-support-economy/>

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy\\_and\\_exchange\\_rates/euro\\_reference\\_exchange\\_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html)





### 3. The Corona Situation (Up until April 25)

#### Egypt

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 4,092 corona confirmed cases
  - 78,353 recovered
  - 47,974 deaths
- 
- According John Jabbour, the representative of the World Health Organization, he counts of coronavirus patients in Egypt are not disturbing. However, he urged more testing to determine true number.<sup>42</sup>
  - Dr. Mohamed Awad Taj El-Din, The Egyptian Presidential Advisor for Health and Prevention Affairs, claimed that Egypt has begun Avigan antiviral drug to treat coronavirus patients.<sup>43</sup>
  - Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, claimed that tougher measures will be implemented if the situation measures urging citizens to abide by government measures.<sup>44</sup>

#### Jordan

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 441 corona confirmed cases
- 326 recovered
- 7 deaths

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<sup>42</sup> Egypt Today, April 24, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/85058/WHO-rep-says-Egypt%E2%80%99s-coronavirus-counts-not-disturbing-urges-increasing>

<sup>43</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 21, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200421-egypt-begins-clinical-trials-of-coronavirus-drug/>

<sup>44</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 23, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200424-egypt-warns-of-tougher-measures-if-coronavirus-crisis-worsens/>



- The World Food Program has pre-positioned food rations in case of diminishing informal market within refugee camps, although goods and materials for the time being are still allowed entry to the camps.<sup>45</sup>
- Jordan eased its lockdown restrictions in several southern provinces where no coronavirus cases have been recorded, as the number of new infections across the country appears to recede.<sup>46</sup>
- The United States has pledged 8 million USD to help Jordan resist the corona virus pandemic.<sup>47</sup>

## Iraq

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 1,708 corona confirmed cases
  - 1,204 recovered
  - 86 deaths
- 
- The Iraqi government has loosened its restrictions ahead the fasting month of Ramadan. Moreover, government offices are now able to work at a 25% capacity.<sup>48</sup>
  - As part of the country's precautionary measures to reduce the risks of the spread of the virus among detainees, Iraq has released 20,000 prisoners.<sup>49</sup>
  - The Director of Karkh Health Department, Gasib Al-Hijami, announced the allocation of material rewards to doctors or medical staff who diagnose coronavirus patients, in form of land.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Relief Web, April 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/unhcr-jordan-covid-19-operational-update-22032020>

<sup>46</sup> Aljazeera, April 22, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/jordan-flattening-covid-19-curve-200422112212466.html>

<sup>47</sup> Arab News, April 8, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1664241/middle-east>

<sup>48</sup> Al Monitor, April 21, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/04/iraq-eases-curfew-restrictions-coronavirus.html>

<sup>49</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 24, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200424-iraq-releases-20000-prisoners-amid-fears-of-spread-of-coronavirus/>

<sup>50</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 23, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200423-iraq-baghdad-to-give-medics-working-with-coronavirus-infections-land/>



## Lebanon

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 706 corona confirmed cases
  - 140 recovered
  - 22 deaths
- 
- By the end of April, Lebanon extended its lockdown by another 2 weeks. Yet, the Lebanese government started to ease restrictions starting from the 27<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>51</sup>
  - Heeding to the warnings of the Human Rights Watch, Lebanon's Social Affairs Ministry announced during the beginning of April that it is launching an aid program for those most in need as the country's worst economic crisis is exacerbated by a nationwide lockdown.<sup>52</sup>
  - As part of lifting its lockdown restrictions Lebanon cuts coronavirus curfew by one hour, to start every night from 9 p.m. <sup>53</sup>

## Palestine

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 339 corona confirmed cases
  - 91 recovered
  - 2 deaths
- 
- According to the Palestinian Authority Health Ministry, the government has received 10,000 coronavirus test kits and ventilators from China.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Arab News, April 25, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1664421/middle-east>

<sup>52</sup> Aljazeera, April 8, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/lebanon-launches-coronavirus-aid-measures-cash-payments-200408150728617.html>

<sup>53</sup> Daily Star, April 24, 2020, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/Apr-24/504896-lebanon-cuts-coronavirus-curfew-by-one-hour-to-start-every-night-from-9-pm.ashx>

<sup>54</sup> Middle East Monitor, March 31, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200331-china-delivers-10000-coronavirus-kits-to-palestine/>



- The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) sent COVID-19 testing kits, masks, special clothing and other basic equipment as part of its fight against novel coronavirus pandemic.<sup>55</sup>
- The Palestinian and Indian foreign ministers discussed over the phone, a possible Indian assistance to fight the pandemic.<sup>56</sup>

## Syria

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 42 corona confirmed cases
  - 6 recovered
  - 3 deaths
- 
- As part of its assistance to Syria to fight off the spread of the virus, the EU allocated €572 million to strengthen the health sector, €1.5 billion for the short and medium term to support the social and economic recovery of the region, and €30.8 million for immediate needs.<sup>57</sup>
  - To protect frontline health workers, WHO and the UNICEF have distributed nearly a million pieces of personal protection equipment - masks, goggles, gloves and disinfection kits - and provided training in their proper use.<sup>58</sup>
  - On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, China delivered to the Syrian government, 2 boxes of medical supplies and test kits.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Middle East Monitor, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200425-turkey-sends-aid-to-palestine-to-fight-coronavirus/>

<sup>56</sup> Wafa, April 23, 2020, <http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=OXVrNH116870509635aOXVrNH>

<sup>57</sup> Relief Web, April 13, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/eu-response-coronavirus-pandemic-southern-neighbourhood>

<sup>58</sup> UN, April 14, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061722>

<sup>59</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 17, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200417-china-sends-2-boxes-of-aid-to-coronavirus-hit-syria/>



## Cyprus

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 804 corona confirmed cases
  - 98 recovered
  - 17 deaths
- 
- Cyprus prepared a 3-phase exit strategy to allow vital sectors to function again in early May<sup>60</sup>.
  - According to Cyprus News Agency, lifting restrictions will take place in four stages from May 4, (two or three months), and provided there is no resurgence of the coronavirus.<sup>61</sup>
  - The health ministry announced that 800 random tests were carried out at the end of April.<sup>62</sup>

## 4. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated)

### Egypt

- Due to coronavirus outbreak, the UNHCR has suspended many of its services to refugees, putting them in even worse circumstances.<sup>63</sup>
- During a phone conversation between Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukr and Philippe Lazzarini, the newly appointed Commissioner General of UNRWA, the former stressed on the importance of increasing support to Palestinian refugees during these troubled times.<sup>64</sup>
- Published in late March, the UNHCR revealed a report showing that the agency has only 8% of its annual budget (108.8 M USD) funded.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ekathimerini, April 15,, 2020, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/251753/article/ekathimerini/news/cyprus-to-prepare-three-stage-coronavirus-exit-strategy>

<sup>61</sup> Cyprus Mail, April 24, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/24/coronavirus-four-phases-and-three-months-for-opening-up-measures/>

<sup>62</sup> Cyprus Mail, April 23, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/23/coronavirus-800-random-tests-to-be-carried-out/>

<sup>63</sup> Ahram Online, April 14, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/367198/Egypt/Politics-/In-Egypt,-coronavirus-crisis-slams-refugee-communi.aspx>

<sup>64</sup> Egypt Today, April 9, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/84496/Egyptian-FM-calls-for-backing-Palestinian-refugees-amid-coronavirus>

<sup>65</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR-Egypt\\_Fact-Sheet\\_February\\_2020.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR-Egypt_Fact-Sheet_February_2020.pdf)



## Jordan

The UNHCR states that there are currently 656,213 registered refugees in Jordan up until the beginning of April.

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

- 193,700 in Amman Governorate (29.5 %)
  - 162,228 in Mafraq Governorate (24.7%)
  - 134,803 in Irbid Governorate (20.6%)
  - 95,134 in Zarqa Governorate (14.5%)
  - 18,565 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
  - 13,063 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
  - 9,277 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
  - 8,453 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
  - 8,359 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
  - 6,537 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)
  - 3,652 in Aqaba Governorate (0.6%)
  - 1,716 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)
- UNHCR made an appeal of 27 million USD to help defend refugees from coronavirus.<sup>66</sup>
  - Even though no case of corona has been detected in refugee camps, the Jordanian government enforced strict regulations on camps, restricting movement.<sup>67</sup>

## Iraq

The UNHCR states that there are currently 248,162 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq.

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

- 124,573 in Erbil (50.3%)
- 88,397 in Dahuk (35.7%)
- 31,533 in Sulaymaniyah (12.7%)
- 1,140 in Anbar (0.4%)

<sup>66</sup> Middle East Monitor, April 1, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200401-unhcr-appeals-for-27-million-to-help-jordan-tackle-coronavirus/>

<sup>67</sup> Relief Web, April 22, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/unhcr-jordan-covid-19-operational-update-22032020>



➤ 1,797 in other areas (0.7%)<sup>68</sup>

- To assist internally displaced people (IDPs) and Syrian refugees in Iraq the Governments of Belgium and Italy each donated 1 million Euros to the World Food Program.<sup>69</sup>
- The EU has sent during April 10 million Euros to Iraq to improve the living and housing conditions of vulnerable returnees and support peace building in western Ninewa.<sup>70</sup>

## Lebanon

Since the beginning of February, the number of registered refugees in Lebanon is 910,256.

Refugees in Lebanon are distributed as follows:

*[Note: This Section has not been updated by UNHCR Lebanon]*

- 344,013 in Bekaa (37.8%)
- 241,102 in North Lebanon (26.5%)
- 222,944 in Beirut (24.5%)
- 102,197 in South Lebanon (11.2%)<sup>71</sup>

- It has been reported that hospitals turned away foreign citizens with undocumented papers and who are willing to take the corona detection test. Also, some disadvantaged foreigners cannot afford the highly expensive tests.<sup>72</sup>
- It has been reported that NGO's and aid groups are having difficulty in getting non-coronavirus medical care to refugees. Also, clinics that serve Syrians have witnessed a 30% drop-off in visitors since March.<sup>73</sup>
- As hunger is being increasingly reported in some locations, the warnings earlier this month issued by the Human Rights Watch, that Lebanon lacks a robust aid program and Syrian refugees are being discriminated by 21 local municipalities, are coming to light.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

<sup>69</sup> Mena Fn, April 23, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100075752/Belgium-Italy-assist-IDPs-and-Refugees-in-Iraq>

<sup>70</sup> Info Migrants, April 2, 2020, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/23816/syrian-refugees-eu-sends-239-million-euros-to-iraq-jordan-and-lebanon>

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

<sup>72</sup> March 28, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/undocumented-struggle-access-coronavirus-tests-lebanon-200328114859620.html>

<sup>73</sup> The New Humanitarian, April 21, 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2020/04/21/Lebanon-coronavirus-refugee-healthcare>

<sup>74</sup> Executive Magazine, April 22, 2020, <https://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/lebanons-refugee-restrictions-could-harm-everyones-health>



## Syria

- Approximately 940,000 People displaced, remain in displacement since 1 December in northwest Syria where 4 million live including over 194,000 women and nearly 566,000 children.<sup>75</sup>
- Turkish authorities reportedly sent 19 buses loaded with roughly 900 Syrian refugees over the border into Syria to be resettled in the country's northern towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain.<sup>76</sup>
- In March 2020, the humanitarian community recorded about 36,800 spontaneous IDP returnee movements in different locations across Syria.
- In northwest Syria, nearly a third of displaced children aged below five years are stunted, and of the recently displaced children, almost 400,000 need support to access education.<sup>77</sup>
- As of 15 April, according to the MoH, around 1,200 tests have been conducted by the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) in Damascus, including 19 from Deir-Ez-Zor and 17 from Al-Hasakeh governorates.
- Currently 1,271 sentinel sites report cases through Early Warning, Alert and Response System (EWARS) system across all 14 governorates.

## Cyprus

- Due to the border shutdown, the Cypriot coastal guard forced 200 refugees back into the sea. They were then rescued by Turkish authorities.<sup>78</sup>
- Katja Saha, the head of the UNHCR in Cyprus, declared that refugees and immigrants must be allowed to have access to accurate information. Also, she claimed that Cyprus is obliged to protect their health and wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak.<sup>79</sup>
- Immigrant support group Kisa denounced what it described as the interior ministry's failure in protecting refugees and claimed that it would be taking legal action.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Relief Web, April 2, 2020,

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20200401\\_flash\\_update\\_nws\\_.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20200401_flash_update_nws_.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> Kurdistan 24, April 9, 2020, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/fec2ad3c-214c-43e6-9cb3-22f096ad4845>

<sup>77</sup> Humanitarian response, March 31, 2020,

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/stima/infographic/syrian-arab-republic-idp-and-spontaneous-returnee-movements-31-march>

<sup>78</sup> Aljazeera, March 30, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/cyprus-pushes-syrian-refugees-sea-due-coronavirus-200330091614066.html>

<sup>79</sup> Cyprus Mail, April 8, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/08/coronavirus-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-need-accurate-information-many-in-dire-straits/>

<sup>80</sup> Cyprus Mail, April 13, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/13/coronavirus-kisa-slams-treatment-of-migrants-amid-pandemic/>





## 5. CHURCH ACTIVITIES

### Egypt

- Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church has decided to suspend Holy Week and Easter-time prayers and services, following suit the nationwide effort to halt the spread of the virus.<sup>81</sup>
- Under the instructions of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Holy See of St. Mark, the Egyptian Coptic Church intervened to assist Egyptians who are stranded in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital.<sup>82</sup>
- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II delivered the Palm Sunday mass at Church in Wadi El-Natroun without any worshippers due to the fears of the coronavirus outbreak in the country.<sup>83</sup>

### Jordan

- In Jordan, church communities and churches have resorted means such as the internet and TV to conduct virtual masses, due to the corona situation.<sup>84</sup>
- To back the Christian communities in Jordan, Noursat, a Christian Television station based in Lebanon, has prioritized filming masses in Jordan so that the faithful can watch from home.<sup>85</sup>

### Iraq

- His Holiness Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, during the Easter celebrations urged the international community to take the covid-19 threat more seriously and to take into the consideration the grave loss in human life, and the deterioration of socio-economic conditions.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Arab News, April 12, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1657386/middle-east>

<sup>82</sup> Egypt Today, April 7, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/83463/Egyptian-Church-supports-expats-stranded-in-Nairobi-Min-of-Immigration>

<sup>83</sup> Ahram Online, April 12, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/367086/Egypt/Politics-/Pope-Tawadros-II-heads-Palm-Sunday-mass-without-au.aspx>

<sup>84</sup> Arab News, April 12, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1656781/middle-east>

<sup>85</sup> Ammon News, April 8 2020, <https://www.ammonnews.net/article/529308>

<sup>86</sup> Azzaman, April 6, 2020, <https://www.azzaman.com/%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%AD-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89->



- According to Father Shamas Armani Director of the media office of the Armenian Orthodox church, , the Blessed Virgin Mary Church (aka Midan Church) of Baghdad, held Easter masses without worshippers for the first time in history.<sup>87</sup>

## Lebanon

- The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, received an open letter asking him to permit worshippers to re-attended masses.
- HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, during the Easter mass in Bkerke, asked the Lebanese people to stay quarantined to prevent the spread of the virus.<sup>88</sup>
- HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church urged nations to unite against covid-19 and to put political differences aside, during his letter on the occasion of Easter.<sup>89</sup>

## Palestine

- Although the Jordan River Baptism site became finally free of mines after 53 years, churches within the area remained closed due to the virus situation.
- HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, during April, reminded people to stay at home to assist in stopping the virus from spreading. Moreover, he praised the measures taken by both Jordan and Palestine, and hoped a cure will be announced soon.<sup>90</sup>

## Syria

- During March, HH Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syriac Orthodox, celebrated the Holy Qurobo at St. Georges Patriarchal Cathedral in Bab Touma, Damascus, and the Holy Qurobo on the occasion of the 40th day of the Great Lent, at Mor Aphrem Church in Mor Aphrem Monastery in Maarat Saydnaya. Moreover, he celebrated the Holy Qurobo on the occasion of

%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AF/

<sup>87</sup> New Sabah, April 14<sup>th</sup>, <http://newsabah.com/newspaper/237171>

<sup>88</sup> Al Jadeed, April 12, 2020, <https://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/news/local/1204202016>

<sup>89</sup> Sana, April 11, 2020, <https://www.sana.sy/?p=1135355>

<sup>90</sup> Mobtada, April 13, 2020, <https://www.mobtada.com/details/925464>



Palms Sunday, and the Service of Nahire (the Feast of Lights) at St. Georges Patriarchal Cathedral in Bab Touma, Damascus.<sup>91</sup>

- In an interview April 4 with Vatican News, Cardinal Mario Zenari, the nuncio to Syria, expressed his concern about the increased spread of covid-19 in a country that has witnessed 10 years of war and which has most of its hospital destroyed.<sup>92</sup>

## Cyprus

- HB Chrysostomos, incumbent Archbishop of Cyprus, called upon believers to realize the severity of the coronavirus threat and to celebrate Easter from home without attending church. <sup>93</sup>
- Due to the virus pandemic, this year, the remains of St. Lazarus stayed in a church in Larnaca, without being carried through the streets.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/>

<sup>92</sup> Catholic Register, April 6, 2020, <https://www.catholicregister.org/home/international/item/31401-covid-19-does-what-war-couldn-t-close-churches-in-syria>

<sup>93</sup> Cyprus Mail, April 7, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/07/coronavirus-holy-synod-has-responsibility-for-moving-easter/>

<sup>94</sup> Reuters, April 11, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-cyprus-lazarus/coronavirus-keeps-relics-of-jesus-friend-lazarus-behind-closed-doors-idUSKCN21T0DD>

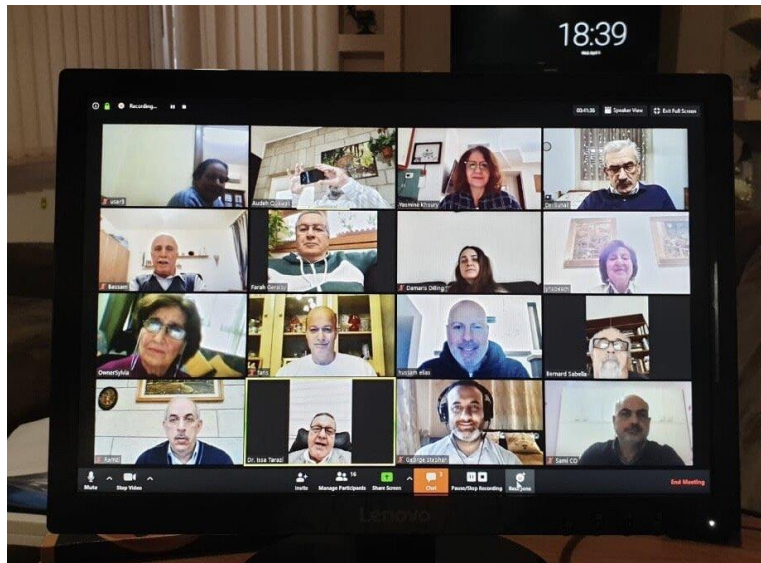


## 6. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

*DSPR updated report on COVID-19 in the Middle East (April 6, 2020)*



*Manufacturing face masks, April 2020, Photo credit: MECC Website*



*DSPR online meetings via zoom, April 2020, Photo credit: MECC Website*



As we approach Holy Week we are all reminded that staying at home is the safest way to celebrate our faith and to ensure that our traditions, communal prayerful rites and rituals would be sustained for years to come. Many of us at DSPR have been invigorated by the Services and Hymns on social media networks by our various faith communities. From the Pope's exceptional prayer with his blessing for the City and the World to Hymns sung by the Greek Orthodox Mount of Lebanon Choir to the Middle East Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches statements and prayers which offered hope and solidarity. The Heads of Churches in Jerusalem and throughout the region have issued statements of support and solidarity with the faithful and the People of God particularly as we are approaching Holy Week. They have asked the faithful to stay at home and to carry on with the prayers and traditions of the Holy Week inside the family with the help of social media. We are thankful for the positive vibes coming out from our spiritual leaders and also from our esteemed partners who did not fail us during the last month with their statements, messages and personal enquiries after us and our beneficiaries.

DSPR in most areas remain locked down with the exception of the Gaza main offices which remain operational despite the 10 cases of coronavirus in the Strip. All other staff are working from home and we communicate with each other constantly. The situation is worrisome not only in the Gaza Strip where only 60 ventilators are available for a population of 2 million but also in the West Bank where 205 ventilators are available for a population of over 2.5 million. The Palestinian health system is under duress and is reaching a critical point. This is the reason behind the strict closures imposed this time by Palestinian police and law enforcement agencies of the Palestinian Authority. The major problem confronting the Palestinians now are the returning workers from Israel with some of them carrying the virus. There are not enough tests to go around in spite of the fact that the Health Ministry has conducted more than 5,600 tests already. Democratic Senators Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts and Van Hollen from Maryland had asked Secretary of State Pompeo to provide coronavirus aid to the Palestinian Territories.

In Jordan, Prime Minister Omar Razzaz announced yesterday the establishment of a Coronavirus Relief Fund 'The Nation's Effort' in order to institutionalize the donation process and to ensure sound management. This Fund is intended for the deposit of large donations and it targets the 200,000 families adversely affected by the virus. The Ministry of Health needs to combat the virus are also included as well as the Ministry of Social Development in order to support and follow up with those families directly affected and the families of day laborers who lost income. Jordan continues with a strict lockdown and the government declared Friday a complete shutdown for 24 hours, thus preempting any mass gatherings for religious purposes.

In Lebanon, the government continues with the full shutdown of the country. A decision was taken to bring back the Lebanese expatriates, estimated at over 20,000, between April 5 and April 12. Priority for return is given to the elderly, those needing medical attention and to those who cannot overstay their



short visas in other countries. Lebanon continues to suffer from economic woes which are likely to further distress the situation of hundreds of thousands of impoverished families and those who lost their wages because of the virus.

In Israel according to Dr. Nihaya Daoud, who is a senior public health lecturer at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, there are disquieting discrepancies between the services offered to the Israeli public at large and to the Arab communities in Israel. Lack of testing, the stigma of infection and the overall lower socioeconomic conditions and overcrowding of Arab families in Israel are reasons for concern that the rather low number of those Arab-Israelis infected, 38 or less than 1% of all Israel infections, is quite misleading. There is real fear that a major outbreak of the virus is imminent in the Arab community of Israel. As a result of the efforts of Arab Knesset members a first drive in testing station was activated in Tamra, an Arab Galilee town, day before yesterday. The station is supposed to move on to other Arab population centers. This, however, remains lacking as the Ministry of Health has failed to include even one professional Arab member in its Emergency preparedness committee. Arab doctors and medical professionals in Israel remain at the forefront of the fight against the virus in Israeli hospitals and specialized clinics. The Jewish Orthodox communities are not heeding the instructions of the government and there is real fear that the infected in their numbers will continue to grow and could jeopardize the efforts of the government to contain the virus.

There is also concern that the period for staying at home could become too long and could result in a variety of problems, including psychological, violence against women and inability to cope with children, especially for families accustomed to a different way of life. No one is immunity from the ill effects of home confinement and already some have been discussing how best to cope with the psychosocial impact of long in-home confinement. There is growing attention to the need to provide risk free environments, as much as possible, for people working in the field and participating in community efforts to help medical staff, police and other agencies bent on helping out the population. This is being considered by DSPR but we need to develop this further in order to ensure that all of us prescribe to the same set of rules as we venture into the different communities.

On DSPR News, we have worked collectively to come up with the Covid-19 DSPR ACT Alliance Global Appeal.

[https://actalliance.org/?post\\_type=appeals\\_r\\_r\\_funds&p=12569&preview=true](https://actalliance.org/?post_type=appeals_r_r_funds&p=12569&preview=true)

We are hoping that we will be able to garner the needed support in order to contribute to the efforts of alleviating the ill effects on the most impoverished and vulnerable families in our midst.

We are hoping that we will be able to garner the needed support in order to contribute to the efforts of alleviating the ill effects on the most impoverished and vulnerable families in our midst. We continue to



hold meetings and in-house consultations via Zoom, which has gained popularity in recent weeks due to its usefulness as a meeting venue. There is worry on some privacy issues related to vulnerability of Zoom to hackers; the Zoom administrators are aware of this and are constantly monitoring the situation. We find Zoom meetings as helpful. The latest of our meetings was on Wednesday, April 1st with the Members of our Central Committee, the five Executive Directors and Central Office Staff.

*Middle East Council of Churches: “Live this time in strong spiritual solidarity” (April 8, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, April 8, 2020, Photo credit: MECC Website*

**On 26 March, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Regional Ecumenical Organizations released a historic joint pastoral statement affirming the urgency of standing together to protect life amid the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The WCC has since been gathering viewpoints from diverse regions about the importance of taking care of our one human family.

*Dr Souraya Bechealany, secretary general of the Middle East Council of Churches.*

**Why did you think it was important to support the historic statement of the Regional Ecumenical Organizations related to the COVID-19 response?**



**Dr Bechealany:** At the moment when the COVID-19 crisis defies and questions the entirety of humanity, it is important for churches to raise their voices loud and clear together in the body of Christ to witness our faith and our hope in the risen Jesus Christ and dare the prophetic word we are entrusted with.

**What do you think is the best outcome of the message?**

**Dr Bechealany:** It is a call to protect our lives and health, and the health of the others, as the highest sign of love to God and to our neighbors. To live this time in strong spiritual solidarity with yourself and with humanity. It is also a call to consider this period as a blessed time that allows us to “profoundly reflect on the common good, good governance and ethical values rooted in our tradition”.

**What is the role of the churches in your particular region at this time?**

**Dr Bechealany:** Accompany the faithful in his trail through the desert, listen to him and give a meaning to the tough and challenging experiences he is undergoing. Suspend entirely the “worships,” the gatherings, and the parochial activities. In the framework of the health care as well as in research, allocate hospitals belonging to the churches to host cases infected with COVID-19. Involve universities in the research; the Lebanese experience is a convincing one in this sense. On the social level, support governments and public orders putting church buildings and social capacities and potentials at the service of the people. Support families and individuals in need.





*The response of MECC Secretary General to the message of UN Secretary General on facing Covid-19 (April 15, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, April 15, 2020, Photo credit: MECC Website*

After receiving a special message that Mr António Guterres, the UN Secretary General, addressed to religious leaders and authorities on 11 April 2020, urging them to join forces in coping with COVID-19, especially during the Easter season and Ramadan, Dr Souraya Bechealany, Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), responded to the call in a letter, in which she commended his initiative that left a positive impact on MECC and on its partners of various faith based organizations, religious Christian leaders and leaders of other religions with whom it shares a common responsibility.

Read the full letter below:



**Your Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres,**

**Secretary-General of the United Nations**

We welcome with deep gratitude the special message you addressed to religious leaders on 11/4/2020 urging all of us to join forces in facing COVID-19 that the WHO called “enemy against humanity”. The Middle East Council of Churches (**MECC**) felt the positive impact of your message as did our partners of various faith based organizations, religious Christian leaders and of other religions with whom we share a common responsibility. In these challenging moments, building bridges of solidarity and developing mechanisms of cooperation for the protection of human beings and their dignity is an inevitable goal we are seeking to achieve hand in hand with UN bodies and agencies, through programs and projects, within available resources.

**Your Excellency,**

COVID-19 outbreak made us want to return to ourselves, to contemplate our relationship with God, with the universe, with individuals and communities. This return, though late, occurs in a deeply complicated health, economic and social situation associated with severe impacts on the present and future of mankind. Therefore, there is a need for an unconventional conscience awakening along with a moral approach to public policy for consolidation of peace, social justice and sustainable development. However, this can only be achieved by recognizing the right to difference and by a noble pursuit of a rational dialogue on the basis that human beings who were created in God’s image have responsibilities towards their brothers in humanity but also towards the components of this beautiful cosmos. This is exactly what we aim for at **MECC** along with our partners worldwide.

**Your Excellency,**

MECC always shared with the United Nations common values and common processes, especially in the fight for peace building and the protection of human rights. This historic convergence deepens our feeling of gratitude towards United Nations’ action in terms of health, relief and development especially in the poorest societies and in conflict areas resulting in tragedies, wounds, displacement, massive destruction of infrastructure and rupture in social fabric.

Therefore, we are addressing ourselves to you, with a hope to see a revitalization of the dynamics of wars prevention and dialogue for ending them. In other words, addressing the root causes of war in parallel with humanitarian interventions to alleviate the pain of victims is needed as much as a good governance of financial, natural and human resources to bridge the gap between rich and poor. Good governance contributes to the implementation of justice and equality.



**Your Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres,**

MECC is standing by your side and the United Nations through prayer and action, hoping to consolidate our cooperation for the sake of human dignity and global peace.

**Yours sincerely,**

**Middle East Council of Churches**

**Dr. Souaraya Bechealany**

**Secretary General**



## MECC's Diakonia Launches a Humanitarian Appeal (April 22, 2020)

MECC's Diakonia launched a humanitarian appeal to assist those whom are really vulnerable to covid-19 by providing emergency lifesaving supplies which include hygiene kits:

نداء تضامن ومحبة  
A call for Solidarity and Love

ورفع نظره نحو السماء وبارك وكسّر وأعطى الأرغفة للتلاميذ، والتلاميذ للجموع  
متى 14: 19

الأيقونة تجسد أعجوبة الأرغفة الخمسة والسمكتين والتي أطعمت خمسة آلاف شخص من الجموع حول يسوع. تدل الأيقونة على أن مهما كانت المساهمات بسيطة لكنها بنعمة الرب تكفي الآلاف من الناس المحتاجين

.....

"Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds"  
Matthew 14:19

The icon represents the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes that lead to the Feeding of the Five thousand people from the crowds that were gathered around Jesus. It also shows that no matter how simple the contributions are, by the grace of the Lord, they can suffice to fulfill the needs of thousands of people

Diakonia's Humanitarian appeal page 1, April22, 2020, Photo credit: MECC Website.



ضمن إطار التصدي لانتشار جائحة فيروس كوفيد 19 في مناطق عدّة من العالم منها منطقة الشرق الأوسط، ومع ازدياد حالات الإصابة في المناطق التي تعاني أصلاً من تداعيات اقتصادية واجتماعية وأمنية وصحية خطيرة مثل سوريا ولبنان، ويهدف التخفيف من معاناة المتضررين من هذه الجائحة العالمية، يُطلق مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط نداء مساندة إنسانية لمساعدة الأكثر ضعفاً من خلال تأمين المواد الملحة التي تحتاجها العائلات المستهدفة بما في ذلك الحاجات الصحية الضرورية.

من هنا يتمنى المجلس على شركائه المحليين والعالميين التعاون لمساعدة هؤلاء المتضررين والتجاوب مع نداء المجلس الذي يستمر في شهادته المسكونية والإنسانية تبعاً لوصية السيد المسيح بأن كل ما نفعله بإخوته إنما نفعله له مباشرة.

متى 46-31:25

للإطلاع على برنامج المساعدات كاملاً والتبرّع يرجى التواصل  
على العنوان الإلكتروني التالي:  
[info@mecc.org](mailto:info@mecc.org)

.....

Within the framework established to counter the spread of COVID-19 in several regions of the world such as the Middle East and due to increasing numbers of contaminated people in places that were already staggering under the burden of numerous economic, social and health repercussions like Syria and Lebanon, the Middle East Council of churches is launching a humanitarian appeal in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of people affected by this unprecedented global pandemic. The objective of the appeal is to support the most vulnerable through the provision of emergency lifesaving supplies which include basic hygiene items.

The MECC hopes that its local and international partners will answer the call to help these people in need and cooperate with the council which is fulfilling its ecumenical and humanitarian mission based on the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”.

Matt 25: 31-46

To read the full aid program and for donations, kindly contact us on:  
[info@mecc.org](mailto:info@mecc.org)

*Diakonia's Humanitarian appeal page 2, April22, 2020, Photo credit: MECC Website.*



*UNHCR, MECC, Adyan, and Issam Fares Institute Together with Refugees  
(April 27, 2020)*



*Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, April 27, 2020, Photo Credit: Michel Muller- UNHCR*

The Middle East Council of Churches, Adyan Foundation, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut and the UNHCR took a unified ethical stance inspired by faith, and jointly decided to meet and discuss the repercussions of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on refugees and host communities. As they are all aware of the need to promote solidarity in order to overcome these difficult times, they issued together a joint statement:



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط  
The Middle East Council of Churches



UNHCR

المفوضية السامية للأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين



Issam Fares Institute for Public  
Policy and International Affairs  
معهد عصام فارس للسياسات  
العامة والشؤون الدولية

adyan

*MECC, UNHCR, AUB, Adyan logos, April 27, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC Website*

**“United, we and our communities can recover...**

**A call for solidarity and social action with the refugee and displaced communities”**

“Since we are all – nationals and non-nationals including refugees – in this together, we share a collective responsibility to combat the Coronavirus pandemic in the interest of our common public health, and our solidarity is crucial.

For the past four months, the world has been facing an invisible threat that has transcended geographic, ethnic or religious borders and boundaries. Hundreds of thousands of people are in pain, and the world has lost more than two hundred thousand lives, many of whom are elderly or people with chronic illnesses and thus belong to the most vulnerable segments of our society. Health, economic and social immunity fell as this “common public threat” – as labelled by the World Health Organization – invaded our human life across all its sectors.

Since then, the world, the whole world, has been living in fear of the continued uncontrollable spread of this pandemic, which we have tried to control through the strict measures that we as individuals, governments, civil society, faith-based organizations, and the private sector have taken in cooperation. The impact of the sacrifices we have all made, in the interest of our common good, was not limited to the health sphere but rather infiltrated our social life, specifically in relation to increasing poverty, the lack of resources and our incertitude regarding the challenges that lie ahead.



The deep fear that took over the hearts of a large number of the world population confined to their homes, and limited our interactions with their families, loved ones, and friends, unified our response to this pandemic; added to it, are the deeper anxieties faced by the most vulnerable who are economically unable to stay home, or by those who have no home at all. And with the same commitment that is uniting us in our fight, we have to ensure that the same deep fear is not exploited to cultivate the phobia of “others” - any “other”, either close to or far from us, including those who are living as forcibly displaced in our community; such exploitation and “negative narrative” would undermine our mutually reinforcing unity and could trigger other types of inequalities and stigma and increases the risks of social exclusion.

The virus does not discriminate between the rich and the poor, between political leaders, royalty or a grandmother, an essential service worker or a doctor and we need to work together, in solidarity, to empower and enable each other to take the precautionary measures, and detect symptoms at an early stage of infection to ensure access to care and prevent further transmissions and safeguard all communities.

Thus, based on our religious, social and humanitarian duty, and as part of our belief that we are all in this together, it is necessary to reiterate the following constants:

- 1- Equal human dignity for all should be the moral compass guiding our work as based on religious texts as well as UN instruments.
- 2- The philosophy of social solidarity is driven by the need to deepen unity and avert scapegoating in the good management of any crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, based on the principle of the common good and the respect for all the rights of the individual, namely his right to life.
- 3- Refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants living in & contributing to our society were forced, due to harsh conditions, to leave their homes and families, and they deserve our support and access to the same treatment, and most importantly, our respect as fellow human beings.
- 4- Social action, aid and cooperation initiatives are most needed at this stage, as well as an awakening of our world moral conscience towards embracing good relations and strengthening communication among all actors within our communities- hosts, migrants & refugees.

Building hope is a blessing in times of hardship; our religious and social responsibility calls on us all, each from his/her position, to fight fear, intimidation and always stand together, even if remotely at this stage, to rebuild the bridges which were temporarily destroyed. The human fraternity bond that brings us together is stronger than any pandemic and barriers.”





*Covid-19, An End to the Lockdown Draws Near? (Article - April 29, 2020)*



*April 29, 2020, Photo credit: BBC News*

**Coronavirus Cases: 2,934,638**

**Deaths: 203,683**

**Recovered: 840,759**

*(Up Until April 26, 2020)*

**By Fouad Kazan - Communication and Public Relations- MECC**

There is no doubt, that the infectivity rate of the covid-19 pandemic has receded over the past few days, ushering glimmers of hope to a world that awaits any subtle sign which could give it relief. Nations had implemented lockdowns, have shut their land and sea borders, and closed their airports in an attempt to quell the spread; which they have succeeded in doing so. Despite this good news and despite all collective efforts, the World Food Program has warned that the global pandemic is in a stage where it can cause global famines of 'biblical proportions,' if not addressed<sup>[1]</sup> while the WHO (World Health Organization) claimed that the virus will stay with us 'for a long time'<sup>[2]</sup>. So the real question arises: Are we truly at the end of the crisis? Will we be able resume our normal casual and work lives shortly, or are we headed to a long term process which will require a great deal of patience and perseverance?



The world economy has shrunk to unprecedented levels, forcing the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva to admit we are in the 'worst economic fallout since the Great Depression' [3]. During a phase which entails nations and governments dipping into their national reserve funds when state revenues have regressed, the world is in a war of attrition against covid-19. In other words: which entity will exhaust the other? Will covid-19 wear us down or will we be able to muster manpower and economic resources to keep on fighting? Up until this present moment 15 entities (including United States, Germany, France, the European Central Bank, China, Sweden, UK, the European Union, Italy, UAE, Switzerland, South Korea, Japan, Austria, and India) have cumulatively allocated a massive \$2.784 trillion to combat the threats of coronavirus; which caused a major financial drain on each of them. [4]

To make matters worse, the WHO warned that there are no indications or evidence that a person has immunity or is no longer at risk of becoming re-infected [5]. This means that covid-19's infectivity rate can suddenly re-spike if nations are not careful with their lockdown measures. Moreover, the high infectivity capability of the virus, the fact that it can survive several hours on various surfaces, and its somewhat long incubation period, all have made such a lethal and silent infiltrator and a burden on the economy. Despite this entire calamity, the world seems fixated on finding a cure to the pandemic. For instance, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, and other representatives of Asian, European, African, and South American countries joined a video call, orchestrated by the WHO, and pledged their countries to accelerate work on tests, drugs and vaccines against COVID-19 and to share them around the globe. [6] Dubbed as a 'common fight', this collective action will lead to the development of more than 100 potential vaccines. Moreover, China, which was not present during the video call, declared that its clinical trials will lead to a vaccine in less than five months. [7] Another milestone worth mentioning, is that the UN has recently launched a collaboration program with public and private sectors in a wide variety of nations to "accelerate the development, production, and equitable distribution of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics" for COVID-19. [8]

When rewinding the entire mentioned above, one can deduce that we are in a stage of uncertainty and ambiguity. Nevertheless there exists hope for a better tomorrow and this predicament will eventually pass by, transforming into a trivial phase in world history. All that is needed is to unify efforts and stand together to fight this common enemy. Thus, only through our collaboration and our perseverance, will we make certain that covid-19 will be completely eradicated. All that remains is the test of our determination, spirits, and our moral values in fighting the outbreak.

***For more information, related to the covid-19 pandemic, do not forget to visit the following WHO (World Health Organization) link:***



<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

[1] CNN, April 22, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/22/africa/coronavirus-famine-un-warning-intl/index.html>

[2] CNBC, April 22, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/22/world-health-organization-warns-coronavirus-will-be-with-us-for-a-long-time.html>

[3] Time, April 9, 2020, <https://time.com/5818819/imf-coronavirus-economic-collapse/>

[4] Business Today, March 18, 2020, <https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/coronavirus-pandemic-us-germany-uk-raise-war-chest-15-nations-allocate-24-trillion-dollar/story/398343.html>

[5] CNBC, April 17, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/17/who-issues-warning-on-coronavirus-testing-theres-no-evidence-antibody-tests-show-immunity.html>

[6] Reuters, April 24, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-who/world-leaders-due-to-launch-covid-19-drugs-vaccine-plan-who-idUSKCN2261M7>

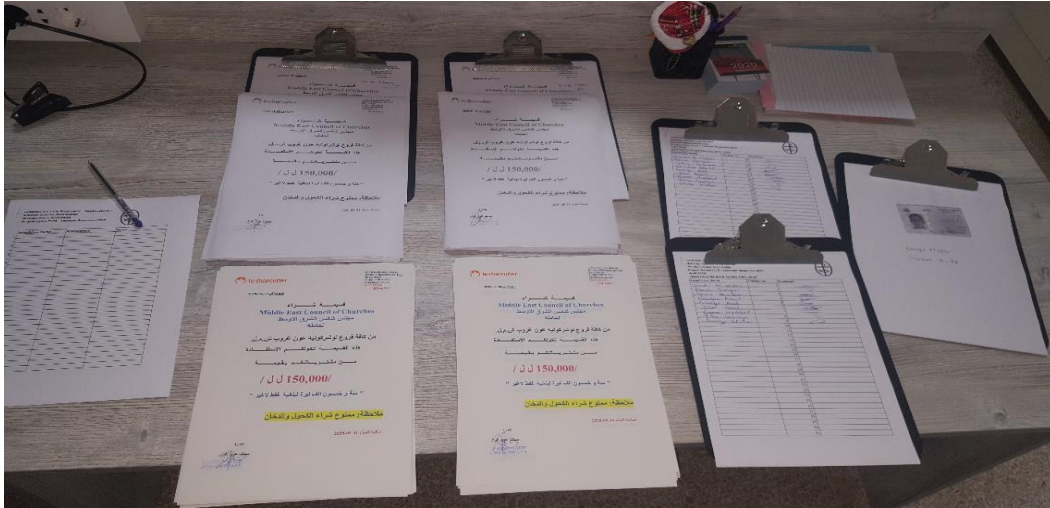
[7] Daily Mail, April 24, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8253689/First-coronavirus-vaccine-ready-September-head-Chinas-CDC-claims.html>

[8] Rappler, April 26, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/science-nature/life-health/259080-latest-updates-coronavirus-vaccine-development-april-2020>

## 7. MECC Humanitarian activities April 2020

### Lebanon

- Assisted 150 families of the most vulnerable Lebanese communities, by providing with food vouchers that could extend livelihood for two months.
- Provided 400 families with hygiene kits.
- Distributed Leaflets containing information about awareness on covid-19 symptoms, prevention and where to go were given. Moreover, leaflets consisted of GBV awareness and hotlines for reporting human rights violations.
- Continued distribution of medication twice a week particularly to elderly with chronic illnesses who rely on the latter at the end of every month.
- Continued partial cure for cancer patients through purchasing of medication and cycle treatments.



Food Vouchers for purchasing essential item, April 2020, Photo Credit: Diakonia.



An elderly patient being treated, April 2020, Photo credit: Diakonia.



*Distribution of hygiene kits and leaflets, April 2020, Photo credit: Diakonia*



## Syria

- Completed the rehabilitation of 4 public schools in Aleppo and Damascus rural.
- Provided tuition fees support for 100 students in Homs, Damascus and Damascus rural.
- Started the tender process to select vocational training and business startup institutes.
- Completed rapid need assessment in two areas in Damascus rural.
- Prepared to start cash for work activities in Daraa governorate.
- Prepared to start livestock activities in Daraa governorate.
- Completed the manufacturing of 5000 face masks in Dara'a
- Published MECC appeal in response to COVID-19.



*Rehabilitation 4 public schools in Aleppo and Damascus Rural, April 2020, Photo credit: Diakonia*



*Tuition fees support for 100 students, April 2020, Photo Credit: Diakonia.*

## 8. CONCLUSION

Although it has been speculated by the World Health Organization that the virus might stay with us for a quiet of a bit of time, there is no doubt humanity will prevail. The fact that INGOs, governments, and societies have demonstrated solidarity, has demonstrated that Humankind's compassion for one another will always be the tide-turner, which will eventually defeat such an enemy.

So once again, just like in the previous overview: "if God is for us, who can be against us". Romans 8:31