



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

Middle East Overview – August 2020

Winds of Change?



President Macron landing in Beirut's airport and greeting President Michel Aoun, August 6, 2020, photo credit: egyptindependent.com

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1. Introduction

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East was colonized among the victors of the First World War. However, after the Second World War, France and Britain gave the colonies their independence. Contrary to national expectations, the newly born states gradually sank in corruption, socioeconomic friction, and sectarian tension resulting into armed struggles. For instance, Palestine began embroiled in a never-ending conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Iraq fell into a brutal dictatorship and security vacuums, which in turn spawned wars. An internal war besieged Syria, attracting regional and global powers to inflame the destruction and chaos rampant throughout the country.

However, winds of change seem to be converging on the region. Lebanon, which was engulfed in its own sectarian civil war, which lead to a failed-state scenario, is receiving quite some attention from France, its former colonizer. After the destructive blast that occurred in Beirut, French President Macron rushed to Lebanon promising to reinvent Lebanon away from sectarianism. Armed to the teeth, with hundreds of experts and advisors, the French delegation headed by Macron, landed in Lebanon, to coerce Lebanese leaders to alter their behavior and to relieve the desperate people living in the country.



2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Egypt

- According to the IMF, Egypt will be prioritizing spending its revenues on health, education, and social protection.¹
- Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly, in a statement, claimed that Egypt have achieved positive economic indicators in the fiscal year 2019-2020 compared to the previous year amid the COVID-19 pandemic.²
- The E-commerce giant Amazon is currently in talks with the government over its expansion in Egypt.³
- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) approved support for the Egyptian economy with a 100 million USD loan to an Egyptian bank called Banque Misr.
- 16.022 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.⁴



The EBRD approves support for Egypt's economy, August 12, 2020, photo credit: Egypt Independent.

Jordan

- The Jordan Strategy Forum (JSF) launched the third version of its regular series about “Jordan’s Product Space” to encourage stakeholders to seize new opportunities to develop and diversify the exports of the national economy.⁵

¹ Egypt Independent, August 11, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/imf-says-egypt-prioritizes-spending-on-health-education-and-social-protection/>

² CTGN, July 30, 2020, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/07/30/roundup-egypt-achieves-positive-economic-indicators-despite-covid-19-statement/>

³ Ahram, August 11, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/376531/Business/Economy/Egypt-discusses-Amazon-expansion-plans-in-the-loca.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.cbe.org.eg/en/EconomicResearch/Statistics/Pages/ExchangeRatesListing.aspx>

⁵ Jordan Times, August 9, 2020, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-strategy-forum-launches-product-space-report>



- According to Moody's Investor Service, Jordan's capital buffers of its banks remain strong despite their profitability weakening as a result of an economic slowdown induced by the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶
- The Amman Chamber of Commerce (ACC) Chairman, Khalil Hajj Tawfiq, and the Kuwaiti ambassador to the Kingdom, Aziz Daihani convened to discuss plans for advanced economic cooperation between Jordan and Kuwait.⁷
- The Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation (JEDCO) launched a program for connecting small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a number of investment funds.⁸
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.⁹



Moody's claims that the profitability of the kingdom's banks may weaken as a result of the pandemic's impact on the economy, however capital buffers remain strong, July 29, 2020, Photo Credit: Reuters.

Iraq

- The Representative of the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) stationed in Iraq, claimed in a statement that the country must address the pandemic or it will fall into extreme poverty.¹⁰
- An Iraqi delegation, led by Finance Minister Ali Allawi went to Saudi Arabia to sign investment agreements in energy and sports.¹¹

⁶ The International, July 29, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/capital-buffers-of-jordan-s-banks-remain-strong-despite-weaker-profits-moody-s-says-1.1056208>

⁷ Mena Fn, August 12, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100626270/Jordan-Kuwait-agree-to-build-advanced-economic-cooperation>

⁸ Zawya, July 26, 2020,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/business/story/JEDCO_launches_programme_for_linking_beneficiaries_with_Jordans_local_investment_funds-SNG_180594280/

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

¹⁰ The National, August 11, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/iraq-must-address-national-crises-or-risk-extreme-poverty-un-says-1.1062281>

¹¹ Reuters, July 20, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/saudi-iraq-investments/saudi-arabia-and-iraq-agree-investments-in-energy-and-sports-state-tv-idUSD5N2BF04V>



- The International Energy Agency and the Government of Iraq held a high-level Ministerial roundtable on investment and economic reforms in Iraq, with a particular focus on the country's electricity and gas sectors.¹²
- According to the Kuwaiti official AlSabah newspaper Iraq is talking to international companies to invest in projects to tap its large associated gas deposits within plans to boost revenue.¹³
- 1193.49 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.¹⁴



A worker adjusts a pipe at the Nassiriya oilfield in Nassiriya, 300km (185 miles) southeast of Baghdad, September 8, 2012. Photo Credit: Reuters

Lebanon

- According to Beirut Governor, damages rendered by the explosion will amount to 3-5 billion USD. Moreover, it will cost the economy 10-15 billion USD.¹⁵
- During this month, the Lebanese pound, when compared to the dollar, increase in value due to the financial donations from the international community.
- After the blast has occurred, societal unrest took to the streets, forcing the government to resign.¹⁶



The scene of the blast in Beirut on August 4, 2020. The massive explosion flattened the port silo and several buildings nearby, left 300,000 people homeless and damaged a huge swathe of the city. August 4, 2020, photo credit: Gulf News.

¹² Hellenic Shipping News, August 3, 2020, <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/ieas-iraq-ministerial-roundtable-shows-support-for-economic-reforms-and-investments/>

¹³ Zawya, August 12, 2020,

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/projects/story/PROJECTS_Iraq_seeks_foreign_investors_in_associated_gas-ZAWYA20200812105253/

¹⁴ Central Bank of Iraq, May 10, 2020,

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

¹⁵ Gulf News, August 5, 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/3-billion-hit-on-lebanese-economy-from-massive-port-explosion-beirut-governor-1.1596647232360>

¹⁶ Deutsche Well, August 13, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/lebanon-beirut-reform/a-54544805>



- Representatives from Germany, France, and the US, flocked to Lebanon to aid the country in its economic reform process.¹⁷
- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.¹⁸

Palestine

- According to WAFA, the Palestinian news agency, Israeli forces uprooted some 100 palm trees in the village of Al-Jiftlik near Jericho, in the occupied Jordan Valleys.¹⁹
- According to representative of the Russian Federation to Palestine, Gocha Buachidze, Russia will open trade representative offices in Palestine.²⁰
- Palestine officially has become a part of the World Free Zones Organization.²¹
- The US House of Representatives on approved \$250 million in funding for Israeli-Palestinian dialogue programs and Palestinian business development.



A symbol of Palestinian-Russian Partnership, August 13, 2020, photo credit: Wafa.

¹⁷ Naharnet, August 13, 2020, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/274125-maas-meets-aoun-says-germany-ready-to-help-but-reforms-needed>

¹⁸ <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>

¹⁹ Palestine Chronicle, August 5, 2020, <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/israeli-forcesuproot-100-palm-trees-near-jericho/>

²⁰ Wafa, August 13, 2020, <http://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/118853>

²¹ Wafa, July 23, 2020, <http://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/118628>



Syria

- The United States on Wednesday July 29th, imposed new sanctions aimed at cutting off funds for Syrian government and warned that anyone doing business with Damascus was also at risk of being blacklisted.²²
- A U.S. company has reportedly reached a deal with Kurdish-led authorities in northeast Syria to develop and export crude oil in areas under their control. The company has also received a sanctions waiver from the U.S. administration.²³
- MTN has announced that it is negotiating to sell its stake in one of the country's two mobile phone companies, marking the exit of the last large foreign investor still present in Syria.
- The Central Bank of Syria has announced that it plans to issue new treasury bonds, confirming that government securities have become a primary tool for raising cash.
- The government is continuing its efforts to weaken Rami Makhoul by putting one of his main companies under judicial custody. The company, Cham Holding, was at one point Syria's largest holding and includes some 70 prominent businesspersons among its shareholders.
- The Prices and trading volumes fell in the Damascus Securities Exchanges last month as Syriatel was removed from one of the exchange's two indices.
- Official Current Exchange Rate SP/USD: 1250 - SP/USD-
Current Exchange Rate in Black Market: 2225 - SP/USD-
The average of exchange Rate in Black Market in August 2020: 2150 SP/USD.



A US armored vehicle drives past an oil field in the countryside of al-Qahtaniyah town in Syria's northeastern Hasakeh province near the Turkish border, Aug. 4, 2020, photo credit: VOA News/

²² Reuters, July 29, 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-usa/u-s-slaps-sanctions-on-syria-in-push-for-assad-to-end-war-idUKKCN24U2EP>

²³ VOA News, August 6, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/us-firm-secures-oil-deal-us-backed-forces-syria>



Cyprus

- The University of Cyprus released two reports claiming the Cypriot economy in decline and will shrink by 7.5% by the end of 2020.²⁴
- The statistical service Cystat published a report stating that exports are dropping about 18% year-on-year.²⁵
- The local statistical service (Cystat) also released a report which demonstrates a severe drop in tourism arrivals. As such, it contracted by 75% from last year.²⁶
- Russia backs out from a double taxation deal with Cyprus, which according to some observers, may deprive the island of Russian depositors.²⁷
- 1. 18 USD Euro official currency value²⁸



A picture of a port in Cyprus, August 13, 2020, photo credit: Financial Mirror.

²⁴ Financial Mirror, August 3, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/08/03/covid19-cyprus-economy-to-suffer-7-5-decline/>

²⁵ Financial Mirror, August 13, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/08/13/cyprus-h1-trade-deficit-narrows-as-exports-down-23-in-may-up-18-in-june/>

²⁶ Cyprus Mail, August 12, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/08/12/tourism-revenue-arrivals-record-low/>

²⁷ The National Herald, August 9, 2020,

https://www.thenationalherald.com/cyprus_economy/arthro/after_surprise_pullout_russia_will_talk_double_taxati_on_with_cyprus-695269/

²⁸ 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:

- 99,115 corona confirmed cases
 - 73,828 recovered
 - 5,440 deaths
- In a televised address, the prime minister claimed that Egypt will require all visitors to the country to present Polymerase Chain Reaction test results for the new coronavirus on arrival from Sept. 1.
 - Egypt started allowing prayers in Mosques on the 28th of August.²⁹
 - According to Egyptian Minister of Health Hala Zayed, Egypt will start producing vaccines with the help of China, once the testing phase is complete.³⁰



Visitors will require PCR test before entering Egypt, August 12, 2020. REUTERS.

²⁹ Daily Star, August 19, 2020, <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2020/Aug-19/510541-egypt-says-from-sept-travelers-must-show-coronavirus-test-results.ashx>

³⁰ Al-Monitor, July 30, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/07/egypt-china-agreement-coronavirus-vaccine-production-africa.html>



Jordan

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 2,034 corona confirmed cases
 - 1,508 recovered
 - 15 deaths
-
- As COVID-19 has re-spiked in August, fears grew about a looming new lockdown.³¹
 - Jordan on the 5th of August decided to reopen its airports to commercial flights from 22 "low risk" countries. However, it will close for a week its only land trade border crossing with Syria after a spike in COVID-19 cases coming from its northern neighbor.³²
 - According to the Jordanian Health Minister Saad Jaber, Jordan is planning to submit a request to purchase Russia's novel coronavirus vaccine.³³



Jordan eyes Russian vaccine, August 11, 2020, Photo credit: TASS

³¹ Roya News, August 13, 2020, <https://en.royanews.tv/news/21823/2020-08-13>

³² Arabian Business, August 5, 2020, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/450084-jordan-to-reopen-to-low-risk-countries-in-august>

³³ Tass, August 11, 2020, <https://tass.com/world/1188443>



Iraq

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 234,934 corona confirmed cases
 - 176,602 recovered
 - 7,042 deaths
-
- According to an Iraqi health official, Iraq wants to secure the Russian COVID-19 vaccine after it is internationally approved.³⁴
 - On the 22nd of August the number of COVID-19 cases has surpassed 200,000 cases.³⁵
 - Fears grew over an increase in infectivity rate, as Shia pilgrims gathered in Karbala.³⁶



Iraqi Shiite Muslims respect social distancing due to the coronavirus pandemic as they gather to commemorate the start of the month of Muharram ahead of Ashura, in the central city of Najaf, August 20, 2020. Photo Credit: AFP

³⁴ Xinhuanet, August 11, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/11/c_139283232.htm

³⁵ Daily Star, August 22, 2020, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2020/Aug-22/510646-iraqi-coronavirus-cases-top-200000.ashx>

³⁶ Euro News, August 22, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/22/shia-pilgrims-gather-in-iraq-s-karbala-amid-covid-19-restrictions>



Lebanon

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 17,308 corona confirmed cases
 - 4,811 recovered
 - 167 deaths
- During this month, the number of corona cases spiked to dangerous levels (Approximately 600 per day).
 - The Lebanese government enforced a 2-week lockdown to attempt to put a lid on the rising number of cases.³⁷
 - Caretaker Minister of Public Health Hamad Hasan revealed that the country is planning to secure the vaccine from Russia when it is made available for purchase.³⁸



A woman wearing a face mask walks past an “I love Beirut” sign, near a shopping district, as Lebanon imposed a partial lockdown for two weeks starting on Friday in an effort to counter the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which have spiraled since the catastrophic explosion at Beirut port, Lebanon, August 21, 2020. Photo Credit: Reuters.

Palestine

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 23,281 corona confirmed cases
 - 15,338 recovered
 - 159 deaths
- On the 13th of August, the Palestinian authorities lifted the weekly lockdown and eased the tight precautionary measures imposed in the West Bank.



The World Bank will allocate 30 million USD to help Palestine fight the pandemic, August 8, 2020, photo credit: Anadolu Agency.

³⁷ Arab News, August 21, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1722571/middle-east>

³⁸ The 961, August 22, 2020, <https://www.the961.com/lebanon-coronavirus-vaccine-russia/>



- Minister of Health Mai Alkaila, during August, claimed that 57.3 per cent infected cases had recovered, and the rate of deaths remained at 0.6 per cent.
- According to the Palestinian Finance Ministry, a \$30 million grant agreement with World Bank for vulnerable citizens affected by the coronavirus pandemic has been finalized.³⁹

Syria

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 2,765 corona confirmed cases
- 629 recovered
- 112 deaths

- The Health Ministry announced on Sunday August 23th, that 74 new Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases have been registered in Syria, and that 15 persons infected with the virus have recovered while 4 others have passed away. This brings the total number of Coronavirus cases in the country to 2217 cases, while recoveries reached 505, and the death toll reached 89.⁴⁰
- The MoH reported that more than 21,070 tests have been conducted (15,850 in Damascus; 2,109 in Homs; 1,940 in Aleppo; and 1,171 in Lattakia, with a current average of 509 tests performed per day) .
- Humanitarian actors have continued to receive unverified reports concerning additional possible cases, and information indicating that in some areas, existing healthcare facilities have been unable to absorb all suspected cases and/or healthcare facilities are suspending surgeries or adapting wards to accommodate increased numbers of COVID-19 patients. Unverified reports have also been received of a rise in obituaries, death notices and burials.⁴¹

Governorate	Total Cases	Active Cases	Total Recovered	Total Deaths
Damascus	791	506	235	50
Aleppo	320	283	28	9
Rural Damascus	264	131	130	3
Latakia	261	244	16	1
Homs	177	152	15	10
AlSw eida	94	78	10	6
Tartous	86	72	11	3
Hama	77	55	20	2
AlQuneitra	63	29	33	1
Daraa	54	47	7	0
Al-Hasakeh	26	24	0	2
Deir al-Zour	4	2	0	2
TOTAL	2217	1623	505	89

COVID-19 Statistics in Syria, August 23, 2020, photo credit: SANA.

³⁹ Andalou Agency, August 6, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/coronavirus-world-bank-to-grant-30m-to-palestine/1933806>

⁴⁰SANA, August 23, 2020, <http://sana.sy/en/?p=200863>

⁴¹ OCHA, August 21, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_draft_covid-19_update_no._9.pdf



Cyprus

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 1,495 corona confirmed cases
- 1,139 recovered
- 21 deaths
- Cyprus during August, started recording new cases in double figures.⁴²
- According to Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou, Cyprus' cabinet has approved long term anti-coronavirus measures to be applied until Jan. 15, 2021. ⁴³
- On the 31st of August, Cyprus shortened its test-free travel list to only 11 countries.



Number of cases continue to rise as government implements new measures, August 21, 2020, photo credit: Financial Mirror.

4. THE REFUGEE SITUATION

Egypt

- According to the UNHCR, the number of refugees is 258,816.⁴⁴
- The Sawiris Foundation for Social Development (SFSD) in cooperation with the WFP, will be providing food assistance through cash transfer for more than 4,000 of women and children.⁴⁵

⁴² Financial Mirror, August 21, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/08/21/covid19-cyprus-cases-stay-in-double-figures/>

⁴³ Xinhuanet, August 21, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/22/c_139308655.htm

⁴⁴ Relief Web, July 29, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/egypt/unhcr-egypt-monthly-statistical-report-30-june-2020>

⁴⁵ Relief Web, August 18, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/egypt/wfp-launches-new-collaboration-support-mothers-and-children-time-covid-19-crisis>



Jordan

The UNHCR states that there are currently 658,756 registered refugees in Jordan up until the beginning of August.

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

- 194,084 in Amman Governorate (29.5 %)
 - 163,115 in Mafraq Governorate (24.8%)
 - 135,457 in Irbid Governorate (20.6%)
 - 95,826 in Zarqa Governorate (14.6%)
 - 18,425 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
 - 13,089 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
 - 9,303 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
 - 8,437 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
 - 8,376 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
 - 6,544 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)
 - 3,647 in Aqaba Governorate (0.6%)
 - 1,709 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)
- In an attempt to curb the spread of the pandemic in refugee camps, the kingdom has recently increased its active surveillance capacity.⁴⁶
 - Authorities fear a spread of COVID-19 in one of the refugee camps in Jordan.⁴⁷
 - A deadly fire in one of the refugee camps in Jordan left many farm workers in despair.⁴⁸

Iraq

The UNHCR states that there are currently 244,024 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq.

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

- 123,104 in Erbil (50.4%)

⁴⁶ Relief Web, August 11, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/inter-sector-working-group-jordan-refugee-response-coordination-coronavirus-update-9>

⁴⁷ Washington Post, August 20, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/08/20/theres-no-covid-19-syrias-worst-refugee-camp-that-may-be-about-change/>

⁴⁸ NPR, August 22, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/22/904605507/no-hope-a-deadly-tent-fire-in-jordan-leaves-syrian-refugee-farm-workers-in-despa>



- 86,673 in Dahuk (35.5%)
 - 31,099 in Sulaymaniyah (12.7%)
 - 1,141 in Anbar (0.5%)
 - 2,007 in other areas (0.8%)⁴⁹
- The United States announced nearly \$204 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the people of Iraq, Iraqi refugees in the region, and to generous communities hosting them.⁵⁰
 - The IOM in Iraq partners with Nadia's Initiative for Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Program to support communities in conflict afflicted areas.⁵¹
 - Germany allocated 8 million Euros to the UNHCR to protect and support internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees in Iraq.⁵²

Lebanon

Since the beginning of August, the number of registered refugees in Lebanon is 880,414.

Refugees in Lebanon are distributed as follows:

- 338,393 in Bekaa (38.4%)
 - 236,448 in North Lebanon (26.9%)
 - 207,286 in Beirut (23.5%)
 - 98,287 in South Lebanon (11.2%)⁵³
- The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi urged the international community to continue its support to over 100,000 Lebanese, refugees and other affected populations.⁵⁴
 - After the tragedy that had occurred in Beirut, the UNHCR started redirecting \$35 million for its emergency response to the most vulnerable Lebanese, refugee and migrant households in the capital.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

⁵⁰ Relief Web, August 19, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/us-announces-humanitarian-assistance-iraq>

⁵¹ OCHA, August 12, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iom-iraq-partners-nadia-s-initiative-women-s-empowerment-and-livelihood-programme>

⁵² Relief Web, August 11, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/thousands-vulnerable-idp-and-returnee-families-across-iraq-will-receive-increased>

⁵³ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

⁵⁴ UN, August 21, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070772>

⁵⁵ UNHCR, August 16, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/8/5f3934cc4/unhcr-mobilizes-aid-beirut-aftermath-deadly-blast.html>



- The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has commenced disbursement of 8.5 million USD from the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF) to provide rapid support to displaced families affected by the devastating Beirut Port explosions.⁵⁶

Syria

- A reported 2,000 Syrian nationals residing in Lebanon have also reportedly returned through land crossings, mainly Masnaa border point.
- Pumping water from the Alouk station in the countryside of Ras al-Ain has been stopped, which led to a stifling water crisis in the availability of drinking water for about one million residents of Hasaka and its countryside. Especially in light of the dangers of the spread of the Corona virus, as residents resorted to unhealthy alternative solutions, such as buying water from tanks and using unclean well.⁵⁷
- The Humanitarian operations across war-shattered Syria are reaching 6.8 million people a month, but a worsening economic crisis is deepening poverty and pushing more and more Syrians into humanitarian need.⁵⁸
- UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has expressed “deep alarm” over reports that eight children – all under the age of five – have died in Syria’s Al Hol camp, where several thousand children are languishing in dire conditions.
- In June 2020, the humanitarian community tracked about 59,000 IDP movements across Syria, which marks a six percent increase from the previous month.
- In June 2020, the humanitarian community recorded about 43,000 spontaneous IDP return movements in different locations across Syria, with almost fifty percent decrease compared to the previous month.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ OCHA, Relief Web, August 20, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-humanitarian-fund-gives-85-million-support-communities-affected-beirut-blast>

⁵⁷ Xinhua Net, August 21, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/21/c_139306304.htm

⁵⁸ UN, July 29, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1069261>

⁵⁹ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/idpmovements_202006june_final_en.pdf



Cyprus

- During the beginning of August, EU relocated about 100 refugees in Cyprus to other European countries.⁶⁰
- Cyprus dispatched teams to Lebanon, to aid those that have been displaced.⁶¹

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, sent an 11-ton relief shipment to Lebanon, as a contribution from the Coptic Orthodox Church, to help ease the impact of the Beirut port explosion.⁶²
- Following a 15-day fast that began on August 7, Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church celebrated the Assumption of the Virgin Mary amid measures to control the coronavirus pandemic.⁶³
- Egypt's churches reopened their doors to the faithful on the 3rd of August for the first time in more than four months due to a coronavirus lockdown.⁶⁴



His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Head of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and patriarch of the See of St. Mark, August 22, 2020, Egypt Independent.

⁶⁰ Tamil Guardian, August 1, 2020, <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/eu-relocates-close-100-vulnerable-asylum-seekers-cyprus-camps>

⁶¹ Cyprus Mail, August 10, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/08/10/cyprus-search-and-rescue-team-returns-from-lebanon/>

⁶² Egypt Independent, August 22, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/egypts-coptic-orthodox-church-sends-12-tons-of-aid-to-lebanon/>

⁶³ Egypt Independent, August 22, 2020, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/amid-virus-coptic-orthodox-church-celebrates-assumption-of-virgin-mary/>

⁶⁴ Arab News, August 3, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1714081/middle-east>



Jordan

- The Sunday Mass has been suspended across churches in Amman and Zarqa, as new health and safety measures have been announced in churches across the country after 17 new COVID-19 cases have been reported among worshippers in a church in the Ashrafieh area in Amman.⁶⁵



Rifaat Badr discussing the new health restrictions implemented in Jordan's churches, August 23, 2020.

Iraq

- His Beatitude Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, during a conference, criticized the inexistence of Christians in Iraqi school textbooks. He considered art and history are a people's "living memory" and therefore called on leading figures of various ethnic and religious backgrounds to make a joint statement to that end.⁶⁶
- The Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kazemi, in tandem with His Beatitude Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako's request called upon Christian Iraqis to return to their lands.⁶⁷



According to Prime Minister, Mustafa Al Kazemi, Christians are the original children of Iraq, August 13, 2020, photo credit: <https://aleteia.org/>

Lebanon

⁶⁵ Roya News, August 23, 2020, <https://en.royanews.tv/news/21978/2020-08-23>

⁶⁶ Asia News, July 30, 2020, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Card-Sako-calls-for-the-preservation-of-Iraq%E2%80%99s-Christian-cultural,-historical-and-artistic-heritage-50688.html>

⁶⁷ Independent Catholic News, August 13, 2020, <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/40233>



- The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, received a letter from The Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church of Greece and Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece, offering their full support in response to the blast.
- HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, reiterated that Lebanese authorities must back away from conflicts in the region, and the government should crack down on illegal weapons depots in the country to avoid catastrophe.⁶⁸
- HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church convened Archbishop Audi to discuss the Beirut blast. The two lauded President Macron’s initiative towards Lebanon and its people.⁶⁹



The Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church of Greece supports Lebanon, as indicated by the letter sent HB Patriarch John X, August 5, 2020, Photo Credit: Ria Novosti.

Palestine

- HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, claimed during an interview with Al Mayadin, The Emirati-Israeli agreement falls within the framework of plans to liquidate the Palestinian issue, and confirms that the agreement aims to keep Trump and Netanyahu in power.⁷⁰
- Pastors representing four of the Holy Land’s historic denominations released a statement claiming that “Annexation could be the final straw when it comes to a viable Christian presence in Palestine.”



HE Atallah Hanna speaking to Al Mayadin, August 13, 2020, photo credit: Al Mayadin.

⁶⁸ Russia Today, August 23, 2020, https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1147068-

⁶⁹ Al Markazia, August 8, 2020, <https://www.almarkazia.com/ar/news/show/241404/>

⁷⁰ Al Mayadin, August 13, 2020, <https://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/1416162>



Syria

- The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, contacted Archbishop Audi to check up on him following the Beirut blast and to assess the situation.⁷¹
- His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church appealed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, the President of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the President of the European Union, Charles Michel, to address the problem of cutting off water to Hasakah in Syria.⁷²



His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, August 22, 2020, photo Credit: NNA.

Cyprus

- Primate of the Church of Cyprus, Archbishop Chrysostomos cautioned the public to be careful over the spread of COVID-19 within churches calling upon all believers to abide by measures.⁷³



Primate of the Church of Cyprus, Archbishop Chrysostomos, August 1, 2020, photo Credit: Cyprus

⁷¹ Albawab News, August 5, 2020, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/4101585>

⁷² NNA, August 22, 2020, <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/498291/>

⁷³ Cyprus Mail, August 1, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/08/01/archbishop-lets-not-let-coronavirus-spread-in-our-churches/>



6. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

Condolence messages in solidarity with the Lebanese people, addressed to the MECC General Secretariat at its HQ in Beirut (August, 2020)



The port of Beirut after the huge 4 August blast, August 4, 2020. Photo credit: MECC website

After the Beirut explosion that devastated the capital, many regional organizations have expressed their compassion and solidarity with the Lebanese people, sending condolence messages to the MECC General Secretariat at its HQ in Beirut.



Following the Beirut Explosion: MECC's Friends Send Their Condolences, Confirming Their Unwavering Support, Thank you! (August 7, 2020)



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

The Middle East Council of Churches

The Middle East Council of Churches logo

Beirut, August 7, 2020

After the catastrophic explosion that hit the Lebanese capital, Beirut, on August 4, 2020, causing massive destruction and devastating this city that has always been full of life, the Middle East Council of Churches' regional offices in Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, in addition to several international organizations, expressed their sympathy and solidarity with the Lebanese people through letters of condolence addressed to the General Secretariat of the council at its headquarters in Beirut.

This disaster, which shocked the whole world, killed at least 140 and wounded more than 5,000 people. Moreover, dozens of people are still missing, and a big number of Beirut's residents, which amounts to about 300 thousand people, have completely lost their homes and no longer have a safe shelter.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), Religions for Peace (RfP), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Ecumenical Commission for Human Development (ECHD), Pro Oriente, the Evangelical Middle East Commission (EMOK), the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Church of Scotland, All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) are among the council's partners that have sent solidarity messages.

The council's friends and partners have all rushed to offer their condolences to the member churches, especially to "afflicted Lebanese families and to all those who lost loved ones". They wanted to confirm their constant support to MECC team in Beirut, dedicating their prayers to this city that "has a central place in their hearts" and calling on the intercession of the Mother of God "Our Lady Harissa".

There is no doubt that adversity draws people together and demonstrates the close ties established between the Middle East Council of Churches and its partners from all over the world. Were it not for the mutual support and cooperation that unite these organizations through prayer and faith, the Council



would have not been able to overcome such obstacles and disasters in order to continue spreading its ecumenical mission in the wounded Middle East region.

Communication and Public Relations Department



A picture of the havoc in Beirut, August 4, 2020, photo Credit: Jowana Khalil/ MECC website

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

*“O God, who will roll away the stone from the hearts of wounded Beirut and its affected citizens”
(August 20, 2020)*

On August 4, at around 6:00pm, a warehouse at the Beirut Port containing large quantities of ammonium nitrate exploded. After an initial explosion, a subsequent blast caused widespread damage, with reports of damage more than 20 km from the port area. Hundreds of buildings including grain silos storing around 85 percent of the country’s grain, and numerous residential places have also been damaged or completely destroyed. Three Christian hospitals in the Beirut Area, which welcome both Christian and Muslim

patients, were severely damaged. Additionally, many historical church related schools in Gemmayzeh, Mar Mikhael and Achrafieh were badly affected just before the coming academic year in September. The Christian quarter of Beirut is totally devastated and at least ten churches have been destroyed. Moreover, official governmental reports estimate that more than 137 people were killed, around a 100 are still missing, over are 5,000 injured, and more than 300,000 people were left homeless in the Greater Beirut area.



As Lebanon is already struggling from the financial crisis, the high rate of unemployment, the hyperinflation and the Lebanese Pound devaluation, while hosting large number of refugees, this explosion came to deepen the crisis and put extra pressure on the Lebanese population, the Lebanese government and the refugee communities. Adding to that the COVID-19 transmission which is straining the country's health system.

Lebanon has been through a lot: wars, crises and catastrophes. But what happened on August 4 in the port of Beirut went beyond anything the Lebanese could have imagined. The explosion reduced large parts of the capital to rubble and made all Lebanese people lose their hopes for a better life. Till now, Lebanon is still living under the impact of trauma.

During many crises faced by Lebanon in the past, churches have borne responsibilities in easing the burden on all people by standing side by side with the most vulnerable through a variety of diaconal services. But today, they are unable to provide their diaconal services due to the destruction of their educational and health facilities. Churches need hundreds of millions of dollars to rehabilitate their prominent institutions that used to serve all strata of Lebanese community alike. Noting that the level of damages in Beirut is beyond the capacity of the Lebanese governments, existing INGOs and LNGOs as to date, it is estimated at around 5 Billion US\$.

For now, Churches' volunteers from all denominations and civil society groups have stepped in to fill the gaps left by the government and began removing the rubble and debris from streets, churches and hospitals in order to show that life can continue in the midst of tragedies, armed with their faith in the resurrected God that is always in our midst. Monasteries and schools were opened to host people who have been left without a roof and daily food is served to people in need.

Since its inception, MECC has always considered that standing with vulnerable people is not just a social duty but a Christian responsibility based on our Lord's commandments. In fact, one of its main strategic objectives is to uphold human dignity in times of conflicts and during all kinds of disasters. Therefore, for quick response, MECC will support vulnerable families by distributing hygiene kits, dignity kits, kitchen sets, bedding sets, food kits, medicines, COVID-19 safety accessories (face masks, gloves, face shields, sanitization) and tools (shovels, brooms, bags, carts for moving rubbles) to volunteers who will help in cleaning the churches, hospitals and the streets. Additionally, MECC's support will include the provision of medicines to many chronic disease people and cancer patients who are living in shelters or with their relatives after having lost their homes. MECC will use the existing mechanism in the churches and other active local NGOs. The distribution will be either through MECC team or through church related organizations and LNGOs for quick distributions. At a later stage, and after completing the joint



assessments with other actors on the ground, MECC will be involved in the rehabilitation of damaged homes, schools and dispensaries.

Lebanon is expecting a strong stand from the international community and international organizations to lend a helping hand in such difficult times. It is time to show solidarity and love irrespective of any differences that can hinder a quick and timely aid. Thus, we call upon all our partners and friends, to answer our call and aid us in easing the huge burden on churches and in rolling away the stone of suffering, terror and despair from the hearts of vulnerable citizens and families affected by this unprecedented catastrophe.

For more details, you can contact us at our official e-mail address: info@mecc.org.

For updates, you can visit our website: www.mecc.org.

For more information and details, and to read the full appeal, you can visit the MECC's website: www.mecc.org

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 (August 20, 2020)



A picture of a church as a result of the blast, August 4, 2020, photo credit: Diego Ibarra Sanchez - The New York Times/ MECC website



Christ is risen indeed He is risen! For two thousand years, Christians in the Middle East have been continuously proclaiming Christ's Resurrection to express at the same time their faith and their confrontation with death, the greatest threat to humanity and creation. Due to its religious, cultural and commercial vivacity and its presence in the heart of the ancient world, their region did not really witness true peace except for intermittent periods. In fact, it was in most cases, a crossroad, a meeting place and starting point on the one hand, and an arena for conflicts and confrontations on the other. Due to raging conflicts and wars, for more than half a century, the Middle East has tremendously suffered violence, extremism and killing, uprooting its inhabitants from their lands and displacing them, tampering with their fate, and undermining human dignity.

On August 4, 2020, a horrendous explosion hit Beirut devastating the capital and plunging it into darkness, blood and pain, horrifying the population. Half of the city today is completely destroyed causing more than 177 victims, 30 missing, more than a hundred in critical conditions and thousands wounded, including young men, women and children ... More than 300,000 Beirutis are homeless today, lost their homes, their loved ones, their friends, their businesses, offices, their livelihoods, their children's future. Moreover, three major hospitals, many churches, mosques, schools and universities are destroyed ... Houses emptied of their inhabitants, disorder, debris, destruction and ruins reign in the streets. People, are broken, traumatized and unable to grasp the magnitude of the shock. The tragedy stunned the entire world and shuddered the conscience of the people, pushing countries and organizations to rush to help this long-standing city and its distressed citizens.

Despite the many tragedies it has faced, Beirut never closed its doors to displaced Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians ... Instead, welcomed everyone in open arms and became a global forum for civilization, art, culture, education, remedy and tourism. Beirut suffered and continues to suffer from destruction, displacement and humiliation, but its great history, its rich cultural heritage, and the model of living together as an existential reality, regardless of religious, ethnic, political and intellectual affiliations, reflect and convey a unique mission. Beirut is a Forum of peoples and civilizations, and Lebanese are a nation of inspiration and creativity.

Beirut does not fear disasters. It is rather afraid of those who do not respect its status and mission and tamper with human dignity in its midst. This is not a valid way to build nations and care for citizens. Did Lebanon not bear enough corruption and mismanagement during the past centuries, leading to financial distress and eventually, to unprecedented levels of poverty and destitution? Isn't it already suffocating because of unemployment, collapse of institutions and banking system and the spread of the Corona pandemic? The recent explosion destroyed the Lebanese people's last hope of getting out of the crisis without external help. Today, Beirut is in desperate need of the others, its friends and supporters.



Beirut is grateful for all those who came to its aid from all over the world. Losses exceeded expectations at various levels whether human, material, or spiritual... Rebuilding the stone is not enough. It is rather necessary to “rebuild” the human being who was wounded by the horror of evil and its destructive repercussions. It is necessary to reestablish the social cohesion between the people of Beirut and restore life, the living together, joy, literature and arts, far from political quotas and sectarian extremism. It is imperative to guarantee a sense of security for those who were traumatized by death.

Since its inception in 1974, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) has always stood by the oppressed and the desperate, the suffering and the victims of war. It stood by the victims of failed policies and natural disasters. It stood by Beirut during and after the civil war (1975-1990), the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982, and in July war of 2006. Today, it is also standing with Beirutis, mobilizing all its human and material capital, relying on its partners from around the world and on their support and backing.

Stemming from its mission and *raison d'être*, the Council launched an appeal to the churches of the world and their partner institutions to help Beirut and its people. It calls on the member churches from all Middle Eastern countries to support Beirutis, heal their wounds, show solidarity and help their spiritual leaders to fulfill their human, moral and spiritual responsibilities. The Council also calls on states, international institutions and peoples of the world to extend a helping hand and defend the afflicted and the innocents. Today, every move, no matter how simple, every act of generosity, no matter how little, and every word of empathy, have a great human value and contribute to strengthening the fraternal bond between human beings.

The Middle East Council of Churches reiterates the basic principles that can restore Beirut's mission and the dignity and life of its residents, and calls upon all officials to help establish firm rules aiming at advocating for mankind and its righteous causes in this city:

1- Human dignity transcends all ranks and sovereignties because human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. It primarily includes the right to life, freedom of expression and religion without compromising the dignity of the other.

2- The importance of revealing the truth and identifying the responsible will prevent the tragedy from repeating. This is the basic right of all victims and of all the Lebanese people. Unless the truth is revealed, human beings will remain in danger of losing their human characteristic and *raison d'être*.



3- Maintaining the need for safety, security, work, food, medication and education as basic needs of human dignity as well as providing psychological and spiritual support for the victims and the traumatized, is renewing the human being as the essential component of the social fabric.

4- Safeguarding religious freedom and difference of opinion, managing pluralism and diversity judiciously and wisely to prevent conflicts, is the way to achieve equal citizenship and a true sense of belonging that will restore the image of Beirut as a unique model of coexistence.

5- Launching a rapid rehabilitation project of demolished houses and historical buildings, will certainly contribute to the preservation of the social fabric of Beirut and its cultural and archaeological environment.

6- Establishing a sound political system in Lebanon which is not based on corruption as a means of exerting power, nor the impoverishment and starvation of the people as a means of accumulating wealth, nor violence as a means of silencing those who are claiming their legitimate rights. Good and just governance as well as care for the people, are the basis of state policy. The least that a true citizen can ask for is a proper establishment of the state, good governance and the accountability of those he elected to run his country and its affairs.

The Middle East Council of Churches calls the world for prayers, for the innocent victims of the Beirut explosion, that this tragedy is not repeated nowhere in the world.

The MECC Believes that the Resurrection of Beirut is the responsibility of the Lebanese, for they only know how to rebuild it, preserving its mission, as they have done repeatedly throughout history. Beirut is theirs! And they are the guardians! It is true that this tragedy hampered and shocked Beirutis, but the Lord of Hope is able to lighten this burden, enlighten them with Christ's resurrection, planting the seeds of Hope in their hearts, and inspire them to hold on to their cry of faith, emanating from within their hearts, until they rise victorious over the evil and the death: Christ is indeed risen!



The first fruits of the MECC appeal to provide relief to Beirut and its citizens

His Holiness Pope Tawadros II sends Humanitarian aid, via Egyptian military aircrafts (August 22, 2020)



Receiving the shipment of aid offered by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, at the Beirut airport, August 22, 2020, photos credit: MECC website.



In a gesture of love and solidarity and as an expression of brotherhood between the Egyptian and Lebanese citizens, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria answered the MECC Beirut appeal in response to the Port Explosion, which occurred on the 4th of August, by relieving the devastated Beirut and its afflicted people. This first contribution was a shipment of food aid and medicines transferred to Beirut airport on board two military aircrafts that arrived through a military airlift by the order of Egyptian President Mohamed Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to send aid from Egypt to Beirut.

The shipment included 26 tons of aid and relief supplies offered by the Coptic Church with the slogan "God is Love" and by the Holy Azhar. The two planes were received by a delegation from the Egyptian embassy in Lebanon, which was presided by Dr. Yasser Alawi, Egyptian ambassador in Lebanon. Moreover, a delegation from the Middle East Council of Churches, which was presided by Fr. Gaby Hachem, a representative of Al-Azhar in Lebanon, the representative of Dar Al-Fatwa Sheikh Zuhair Kubba, and representatives of the Lebanese and Egyptian armies, were present at the event.

The Middle East Council of Churches represented by Father Gaby Hashem thanked the Egyptians, especially His Holiness Pope Tawadros, who always carried Lebanon in his heart, for their solidarity and love during these sad days. Fr. Hachem also thanked President Sisi, who showed solidarity and love that exceeded expectations. Furthermore, he had affirmed that the MECC continues its historical and humanitarian mission as its team in Beirut is striving to receive relief aid from the churches, partners and friends in various countries of the world, so they can all participate in restoring life to Beirut and in supporting its citizens by reestablishing their homes and their human dignity.



A Delegation from MECC Visits the Heads of the Damaged Churches in Beirut

SG Dr Bechealany: “We have issued an appeal to help the devastated city of Beirut and its distressed people” (August, 2020)



An MECC Delegation visting His Eminence Paul Abdel Sater, Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, and His Eminence Metropolitan Elias Audeh, Arbchichop of Beirut Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut, as part of its visits to the head of Churches in Beirut after the Beirut explosion, August, 2020, photos credit: MECC website



In the wake of the Beirut Port explosion that occurred on August 4, 2020 and resulted in massive destruction and damage to public and private properties, as well as to churches and their institutions, Dr. Souraya Bechealany, Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), visited the council's member churches in Beirut.

Dr Bechealany headed a delegation from the Middle East Council of Churches, which included Father Gaby Hachem, Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department (TED), Mrs. Huguette Salameh, Director of the Communication and Public Relations Department, Mrs. Seta Hadesian, MECC Executive Assistant and Dr. Michel Abs, member of the executive committee. The Secretary General visited the heads of the damaged churches, extending her condolences to the victims of the horrific explosion and wishing recovery to the wounded and injured. She also briefed the bishops on the appeal launched by the Council to provide relief for the wounded city of Beirut and its afflicted people. MECC Secretary General also emphasized that the Council is putting all its capabilities in the relief and development field at the disposal of churches to support and help Beirut's parishes and all those who are in need or were affected by the explosion.

Bechealany also put forward the ways and mechanisms of cooperation between the dioceses and the Council to distribute international donations and the aid which the Council has begun receiving from its partners and churches around the world, who want to rebuild the wounded capital and support its people.

During the tour, Bechealany and the accompanying MECC delegation visited His Beatitude Patriarch Gregoire Pierre XX Ghabroyan, Catholicos Patriarch of Cilicie of Armenian Catholics, Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union in Lebanon and president of the MECC on behalf of the Evangelical family, His Eminence Metropolitan Elias Audeh, Archbishop of Beirut Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut, His Eminence Paul Abdel Sater, Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, His Eminence George Bacaouni, Greek Catholic Melkite Metropolitan of Beirut and Byblos, His Eminence Metropolitan Mor Clemis Daniel Malak Kourieh, Archbishop of Beirut and Benevolent institutions in Lebanon, Syriac Orthodox Church, His Eminence Archbishop Chahe Panossian, Armenian Orthodox Church in Lebanon, , and Rev. Megrđitch Karagoezian, President of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. MECC Secretary General also called His Eminence Mgr Mathias Charles Mrad, Syrian Catholic Church, for the same purpose.



MECC Is Working on Launching an Ecumenical Youth Platform (August 25 and 26, 2020)



A screenshot of the youth meeting with the TED department team, August 25 and 26, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

On Tuesday 25 and Wednesday 26 August, the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department (TED) held two virtual meetings with around 17 young people from various churches in Lebanon. These two gatherings were a follow-up to the youth consultation seminar held by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) on the 11th of July 2020, within the “Kairos Middle East: Towards Churches Global Compact” process. Both meetings focused on developing the recommendations that were made by the youth during the first consultation seminar.

As the MECC believes in the pioneer role of the youth in facing the repercussions of the Beirut explosion that occurred on the 4th of August 2020, the objective of these two meetings was to establish an ecumenical platform for the youth, through which initiatives inspired by young people’s aspirations and concerns would be launched to address the disaster. These initiatives would be organized by youth from different churches and other religions and would act as a common testimony to unity among the citizens of one country.

It is worth noting that these meetings will be followed by other similar events in order to reach the desired goals.



Interview on Télé Lumière and Noursat with Fr. Gaby Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department, focusing on MECC Beirut appeal (August, 2020)



Interview on Télé Lumière and Noursat with Fr. Gaby Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department, August, 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.

This week, Fr. Gaby Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department, was the guest of the journalist Lea Maamari on the show.

Click on the following link to watch the full episode: <https://bit.ly/2YGHvWt>



Interview on Télé Lumière and Noursat with Eng. Samer Laham, Director of the MECC Diakonia Department, Focusing on MECC Beirut Appeal (August, 2020)



Interview on Télé Lumière and Noursat with Eng. Samer Laham, Director of the MECC Diakonia Department, August, 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, Eng. Samer Laham, the director of MECC Diakonia department, was the guest of the journalist Lea Maamari on the show. During the interview via Skype, Mr. Laham highlighted the MECC Beirut Appeal and the international fundraising campaign which was launched to provide relief to Beirut. He mentioned the first donations offered by His Holiness Tawadros II, the Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, on behalf of the Egyptian people. Mr. Laham also stressed the continuous humanitarian role played by the Council since its inception in 1974.

To watch the full interview, you can visit the MECC's website: www.mecc.org



Relief Supplies Offered to the Afflicted Families in Beirut, a Gesture of Love From His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt (August, 2020)



MECC Diakonia Department's team and a group of youth volunteers sorting the shipment of aid received from Egypt, dividing, packing and distributing them, August, 2020. photos credit: MECC website



Within the framework of the MECC appeal to provide relief for the devastated Beirut and its afflicted people, because of the 4 August blast, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria hastened to respond to the appeal by offering a shipment of aid included 11 tons of food products, medicines and medical supplies.

Following up the process of distributing it to beneficiaries, the MECC Diakonia Department's team and a group of youth volunteers sorted the offered products and medical supplies, divided and packed them. Therefore, and in coordination with the churches' secretaries, the aid packages will be distributed to the affected families in many parishes in the National Evangelical church of Beirut, Armenian Catholic Church, Maronite Church, Greek Orthodox Church of Beirut, Armenian Orthodox Church and Armenian relief committee, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut, Syrian Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, and Armenian Evangelical Church.

These aid and relief supplies were offered by the Coptic Orthodox Church under the slogan of "God is love", as an expression of solidarity with the suffering Lebanese people, and as a gesture of brotherhood between the Egyptian and Lebanese citizens attested by the history.

An MECC Delegation visiting the Coptic Orthodox Church in Beirut (August 31, 2020)



An MECC Delegation visiting the Coptic Orthodox Church in Beirut, August 31, 2020, photos credit: MECC website



A delegation from the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) including Father Gaby Alfred Hachem, Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department (TED), Sister Emily Tannous, Coordinator of the Department, and Mrs. Seta Hadesian, representing Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, visited the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sin El Fil, to meet with His Eminence Anba Antonius, Coptic Bishop of Jerusalem, Lebanon, Kuwait and the Gulf and to welcome Coptic Monk Timon Al-Suriani, who was appointed as the new Head of the Coptic Church in Lebanon.

On behalf of the Council and the Church in Lebanon, the delegation renewed its gratitude for His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and the Coptic Church for their affection, love and support demonstrated during the catastrophe that devastated Beirut on the fourth of August.

The delegation also explained to His Eminence the work of the Council, its ecumenical endeavor, its programs in the Middle East, as well as its main role in the relief and reconstruction of Beirut through its spiritual and humanitarian appeal, and its call for solidarity addressed to partners, organizations and governments in the world. The delegation wished Rev. Timon all the luck in his blessed service to the Coptic Church and hoped he will be able to establish a fruitful cooperation with the churches in Lebanon, noting that he had worked for years as director of the Youth Program in the Council of Churches.



Beirut Blast, MECC, ACT Alliance and WCC Joint Statement (September 4, 2020)



A volunteer in the Civil Defense rescuing an injured person in the Beirut explosion, August 4, 2020, photo credit: Anwar/ MECC website



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches



World Council
of Churches

actalliance

Beirut 4 September 2020

On the lapse of a month after the Beirut blast disaster, the World Council of Churches (WCC), ACT Alliance and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) presented their condolences to all Lebanese people who lost their loved ones in the catastrophic explosion that ripped through the heart of Beirut on 4 August 2020. They declared their solidarity with the bereaved, the injured, the displaced and the suffering.



The statement signed by the General Secretary of ACT Alliance M. Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, World Council of Churches Interim General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca and the Middle East Council of Churches Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany, started, “On behalf of the international ecumenical community, ACT Alliance is launching an appeal as part of the international humanitarian response to this disaster, and we join in calling on the international community for a comprehensive humanitarian mechanism of coordination and collaboration with Lebanese civil society.

We recognize and lift up the swift and effective actions taken by Lebanese civil society to respond and to alleviate the suffering of those affected. The civil society response to the disaster is a significant sign of hope, strengthening people’s capacity to overcome this enormous crisis and to restore hope in the society for the future of the nation”.

The Statement also added “Together, WCC ACT Alliance and MECC emphasize the following elements as crucial for a sustainable recovery:

1. There must be real accountability for this disaster, through an independent investigation. We call on the international community, through the UN, to ensure that the causes of this disaster are investigated and established by a credible independent process, that those responsible are brought to justice, and that impunity is avoided.
2. While immediate humanitarian assistance is essential and fundamental, ensuring long-term resilience is crucial for Lebanon’s sustainable recovery from multiple shocks – bringing together humanitarian, development and peace and human security components in a comprehensive systemic approach. The explosion and its consequences compound a deep pre-existing economic and social crisis, with 50% of Lebanese people living under the poverty line and 400,000 suffering displacement. A comprehensive, detailed and sustained engagement is required to ensure lasting positive impact.
3. WCC, ACT Alliance and MECC join in calling on all their members and partners to galvanize their resources - human, financial, communication/technical and spiritual - to support the Lebanese people to overcome this profound crisis.
4. WCC and ACT Alliance affirm and support the role and response of the Middle East Council of Churches, the Lebanon ACT Appeal, and all initiatives faith-based organizations and churches take to respond to not only to the humanitarian needs of the Lebanese people but also spiritual needs through trauma-healing interventions and counseling”. The joint statement concluded, “This is a critical and historical existential



moment for Lebanon - a haven for religious and social diversity in the Middle East - and as such, we are all concerned and called upon to help ensure Lebanon's survival. With all the tragedies and challenges of its past and present, Lebanon stands as a sign and symbol of living together in diversity. The people of Lebanon deserve our support to survive and endure and to regain hope for their future".

**The Middle East Council of Churches
Communication and Public Relations Department**

Full Statement:

The World Council of Churches (WCC), ACT Alliance and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) present their condolences to all Lebanese people who lost their loved ones in the catastrophic explosion that ripped through the heart of Beirut on 4 August 2020. We stand in solidarity with the bereaved, the injured, the displaced and the suffering.

On behalf of the international ecumenical community, ACT Alliance is launching an appeal as part of the international humanitarian response to this disaster, and we join in calling on the international community for a comprehensive humanitarian mechanism of coordination and collaboration with Lebanese civil society.

We recognize and lift up the swift and effective actions taken by Lebanese civil society to respond and to alleviate the suffering of those affected. The civil society response to the disaster is a significant sign of hope, strengthening people's capacity to overcome this enormous crisis and to restore hope in the society for the future of the nation.

Together, WCC ACT Alliance and MECC emphasize the following elements as crucial for a sustainable recovery:

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4. WCC and ACT Alliance affirm and support the role and response of the Middle East Council of Churches, the Lebanon ACT Appeal, and all initiatives faith-based organizations and churches take to respond to not only to the humanitarian needs of the Lebanese people but also spiritual needs through trauma-healing interventions and counseling.

This is a critical and historical existential moment for Lebanon - a haven for religious and social diversity in the Middle East - and as such, we are all concerned and called upon to help ensure Lebanon's survival. With all the tragedies and challenges of its past and present, Lebanon stands as a sign and symbol of living together in diversity. The people of Lebanon deserve our support to survive and endure, and to regain hope for their future.

Middle East Council of Churches

Secretary General

Dr. Souraya Bechealany

World Council of Churches

Interim General Secretary

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Saucă

ACT Alliance

General Secretary

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria



On the lapse of a month after the Beirut blast disaster, the Communication and PR Department prepared tribute video to the wounded Beirut under the title: Beirut, you are not alone (September 4, 2020)



The Wounded and destroyed Beirut, and its injured people due the Beirut Explosion, August 4, 2020, photo credit: Anwar/ MECC website

One month has passed since the Beirut Port explosion, that devastated the capital of light, freedom, wisdom, joy and living together, transforming it into a capital stricken at the core.

Beirut, you are not alone

For four weeks, the Lebanese people have lived an endless period of great pain. August 4, 2020, 6:07 pm... A date that Lebanese will never forget, after they have witnessed moments of terror in a city that drowned, in less than minutes, under rubble and debris. In a few seconds, this disaster stole from 300,000 Lebanese their loved ones, friends, houses, properties and livelihoods... This disaster claimed 200 lives and left 6,500 injured.



30 days have passed since this tragedy, and Lebanese people are drowned in a sea of sorrows; many families are now homeless, dreams were buried under the rubble, and the future became unknown ... Pain remains engraved in the heart of every Lebanese, and scenes of destruction, blood and funerals are stuck in their mind forever. However, Beirut is not alone. The Lebanese, especially the youth, hastened to save it from its misery, and the whole world offered its help to restore life in the capital. This capital has always been a meeting place for civilizations and peoples and a global forum for art, culture, education, medicine and tourism. Therefore, Beirut will rise again. Beirut will rise from its ashes, and will stand tall, as an icon of the Middle East.

A month later, the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department's team visited the afflicted streets of Beirut and its suffering people, asking them about their needs, their concerns, ways to support them and their hope in the future ... The team documented all these testimonials in a short video, so that we never ever forget this tragedy!

The video is a tribute to the wounded Beirut. It was prepared by the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department.

Investigation: Mira Kassarji.

Photography and Editing: Johnny Antoun.

Text: From the "MECC appeal to provide relief to Beirut," prepared by the Theological and Ecumenical Department (TED).

You can watch the video, on the following link: <https://bit.ly/320ky2t>



The Communication and PR Department launched the MECC Beirut Weekly Newsletter (August, 2020)



Beirut weekly newsletter, August, 2020, photo credit: MECC

To receive the MECC Beirut Newsletter, you can send your email to: info@mecc.org



The Communication and PR Department launched a platform dedicated to the MECC's 12th General Assembly (August, 2020)

Towards the 12th General Assembly

“Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (Matthew 14:27)



Some of the books issued after the previous General Assemblies, August, 2020, photo credit: MECC website

After the Executive Committee meeting of the Middle East Council of Churches held on the 21st and 22nd of January, 2020 in Larnaca – Cyprus, a date was set for the 12th General Assembly. The Assembly was expected to be held from 16 to 19 September 2020, and generously hosted by His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rai, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, in Bkerke – Lebanon. It was supposed to be entitled: "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid!" (Matthew 14:27).

However, due to the exceptional circumstances that the world is facing, especially Middle Eastern countries, as a result of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the Presidents of the Council i.e His Beatitude Youhanna X, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, His Beatitude Mar Louis Raphael Sako and Rev. Habib Badr, met online several times, at the invitation of Dr. Souraya Bechealany, the General Secretary of the Council. They issued a recommendation to the Executive Committee of the Middle East of Churches calling for the postponement of the General Assembly until a date to be determined later. After approval, it was decided to hold an Executive Committee meeting instead, on September 18, 2020 in



Bkerke. Noting that the members of the committee who are present in Lebanon will participate in person, while the rest of the members from the various member churches in the Middle Eastern countries will participate virtually.

7. MECC Humanitarian activities August 2020

Lebanon

- Received an emergency shipment consisting of 10 tons of food items and one ton of medication from The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. They will be distributed in cooperation with member churches to those directly distressed by the Port Tragic Blast in the immediate Beirut affected area.
- Distributed vouchers worth 390 000 LBP used for purchasing food and hygiene kits, to 64 most vulnerable HH from Debel, kawzah, Beit Lif, Ayta El Chaab and Yaroun in the Bent Jbeil district.
- Continued partial cure to cancer patients through purchasing of medication and cycle treatments.
- Continued distribution of medication particularly to elderly with chronic illnesses who rely on the latter at the end of every month.
- Completed 8 sessions of Health Awareness on COVID-19 – prevention, precautions for 64 women.
- Completed 16 sessions in Psychosocial support for 24 women.
- Completed 16 sessions in psychosocial support for 24 children.
- Completed 2 recreational sessions in the form of a day camp for 12 children.
- Delivered 4 sessions of Mental health for 40 women.
- Completed 4 sessions for 5 women in a development program that aims to benefit the participating ladies by using a participatory approach and hiring, training and paying them for painting bags for the Council.
- Completed 18 sessions in soft skills for 24 women.



MECC team and volunteers preparing the shipment from Egypt for distribution in Lebanon, August 2020, photo credit: Diakonia



Women empowerment session, August 2020, photo credit: Diakonia



PSS and Soft Skills sessions for women, August 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.

Syria

- Continued providing veterinary services to hundreds of cattle owner in Daraa governorate.
- Completed providing grants to restore the broken business of 12 skilled workers.
- Completed vocational training for 25 youth in Damascus rural under men hairdressing and sewing, and launching business startup course for the graduated beneficiaries.
- Completed Crochet training course for 20 women in Damascus rural.
- Completed health awareness activity combined with distribution of hygiene kits to 1852 HH in Izraa and Daraa.
- Continued of protection activities in Daraa governorate to target 500 HH with health and PSS consultations.
- Continued the rehabilitation of five schools in Homs and Damascus rural.
- Continued health project to provide medication for cancer patients.
- Continued waste management activities in Izraa and Sheikh Maskin by hiring 100 workers under cash for work project.
- Completed the distribution of 730 food baskets and 1645 hygiene kits in Jaramana.
- Completed the distribution of food baskets to 140 families in Aleppo.



- Prepared to distribute summer seeds as micro gardening kits for 165 families in Daraa.



Vocational training for 25 youth in Damascus rural under men hairdressing and sewing, August 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Crochet training course for 20 women in Damascus Rural, August 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Distribution of 730 food baskets and 1645 hygiene kits in Jaramana, August 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Health awareness activity and distribution of hygiene kits in Izraa and Dara, August 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



8. CONCLUSION

Maybe the French initiative is a prelude to other similar acts in the region. Maybe it is time to help the Middle East population get rid of the obsolete political systems, which have only lead to destruction and chaos. Maybe the time has finally come to force a lasting and sustainable peace in the ME region. Unfortunately, it is too soon to tell as their might be a secret political agenda, which we do not know about. Only time will tell.