



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

Middle East Overview – May 2020

The challenges resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic



A representation of COVID-19's economic impact, May 1, 2020, Photo Credit: New Jersey Business

Headoffice

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



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1. Introduction

While the gravity of the corona situation in the Middle East is becoming of less danger, its ghosts still haunts the economy. Most of the citizens during the confinement period have abided by the measures and have succeeded in mitigating the proliferation of covid-19. Yet, there is always concern of a second wave of the pandemic immerging out of the blue, either by a situational-changing factor or by a miscalculated loosening of restrictions. Either way, as a region, we are nevertheless moving forward in this domain and hopefully life can get back to normal.

MECC, from its end, started to gradually return to normal office ours. However, the office remains closed to meetings with partners. From this point on, several meetings about MECC projects, were held online. As such, MECC combined online elements with the traditional brick and mortar space to adapt to its current circumstances, and to continue its ecumenical and humanitarian mission.



2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Egypt

- The Egyptian government announced on the 6th of May the lift of certain measures as the economy suffers.¹
- The Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Hala al-Saeed claimed that the Egyptian economy is expected to achieve a growth rate of 3.5 percent during the next fiscal year assuming the coronavirus crisis ends by the end of the current fiscal year.
- A ministerial economic committee chaired by Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly touched on implementing President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's orders to consider proposals for the Central Bank of Egypt to work with other banks and negotiate with 93,000 clients subjected to assets seizure to settle their due amounts.
- The Egyptian Hotels Associations received requests to restart operations of tourist resorts in the Red Sea Governorate, in accordance with the decision of the Cabinet Ministers to open hotels by mid-May.²
- According to Egypt's Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly, the investment budget for the coming fiscal year will surge to EGP 230 billion, up from EGP 150 billion last year.³
- 15.6986 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.⁴

Jordan

- As government finances are dealt a heavy blow, it is estimated that Jordan's deficit will rise by 1.4 billion dollars throughout 2020.⁵
- According to the Jordanian Finance Minister, the economy will shrink by 3% at the end of 2020.⁶

¹ Voice of America, May 6, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/egypt-announces-partial-opening-economy-plunges>

² Egypt Independent May 9, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/egypt-begins-preparing-to-reopen-businesses-post-coronavirus/>

³ Ahram, May 7, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/368833/Business/Economy/Egypt's-next-investment-budget-upped-to-EGP--bln-Pr.aspx>

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

⁵ Reuters, May 7, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-jordan-economy/jordan-deficit-forecast-to-rise-by-14-billion-as-economy-hit-by-coronavirus-fin-min-idUSL8N2CPA5U>

⁶ Daily Star, May 4, 2020, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2020/May-04/505329-jordan-sees-economy-down-3-percent-in-2020-due-to-coronavirus.ashx>



- Minister of Industry and Trade Tariq Hammouri declared on the 3rd of May, that businesses and industries would now be able to resume production.⁷
- The Jordan Investment Commission (JIC) arranged virtual meetings with investors from Singapore, Turkey and Arab and non-Arab countries with the aim of promoting the Kingdom as an attractive investment destination.⁸
- Fitch Ratings affirmed Jordan's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BB-' and revised the Outlook to Negative from Stable.⁹
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.¹⁰

Iraq

- Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani discussed with US Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette over the phone, the possibility of boosting energy investment, developing economic cooperation, and unlocking international financial assistance.
- Spokesperson of the Ministry of Energy Umed Mohammed has declared during an interview that the nationwide installation of new smart electricity meters would be completed by mid-2021 and will cut down energy costs.¹¹
- According to the Rabee Securities Iraq Stock Exchange (ISX) market report, Iraq's stock market has jumped by 9%.¹²
- According to the daily Alsabab, Iraq is planning to build 250,000 houses per year and nearly 100,000 units are to be constructed by foreign developers, to address supply shortages.¹³
- A new law, which will grant Iraq's new reconstruction council additional authority to quickly launch major projects across the country, will soon be implemented.¹⁴

⁷ Aljazeera, May 3, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/jordan-lifts-curbs-economy-coronavirus-lockdown-eases-200503165530904.html>

⁸ Jordan times, May 7, 2020, <http://jordantimes.com/news/local/jic-hold-virtual-meetings-international-parties-encourage-investment-jordan>

⁹ Fitch Ratings, May 8, 2020, <https://www.fitchratings.com/research/sovereigns/fitch-revises-jordan-outlook-to-negative-affirms-at-bb-08-05-2020>

¹⁰ <http://statisticaldb.cbj.gov.jo/index?action=level4>

¹¹ Kurdistan24, May 9, 2020, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/cb7310da-ac3c-4db5-a0b2-467c24c6ce62>

¹² Mena Fn, May 9, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100141243/Iraq-Stock-Market-Jumps-9>

¹³ Zawya, May 10, 2020, https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/story/Plan_to_build_250000_houses_a_year_in_Iraq-ZAWYA20200510092047/

¹⁴ Zawya, May 6, 2020, https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/business/story/Iraqs_new_reconstruction_council_to_oversee_oilforprojects_deal_with_China-ZAWYA20200506191151/



- On May 6, the head of the farmers cooperatives union in Iraq urged farmers across Iraq to speed up the harvest of wheat and barley to protect their crops from wild fire.¹⁵
- 1,190 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.¹⁶

Lebanon

- Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government approved a long-awaited plan in an attempt to apply for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) program to help the economy.¹⁷
- At the end of April and lasting till the beginning May, demonstrations took the streets to due to the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and the increasing dollar shortage.¹⁸
- According to the combined financial statements of several banks, Lebanon's total banking assets in the first quarter of 2020, dropped by 3.8%.
- The exchange rate of the dollar against the LBP reached sky high to above 4000 LL causing hyperinflation.
- Lebanese banks' loans to the private sector (resident and non-resident) shrank by 9.55 percent, equivalent to about \$4.75 billion in the official approved price, to reach about \$45 billion.
- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.¹⁹

Palestine

- The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) claimed that the Palestinian economy will incur losses of about \$2.5 billion in case the coronavirus pandemic lasts for three months.²⁰
- According to a senior Palestinian official, over 60 percent of economic enterprises have resumed operation in Palestine, after being interrupted due to the lockdown imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.²¹

¹⁵ Enabling peace, May 6, 2020, <https://enablingpeace.org/ishm253/#Headline4>

¹⁶ 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>

¹⁷ France 24, April 30 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200430-lebanon-approves-long-awaited-economic-rescue-plan-after-weeks-of-unrest>

¹⁸ Aawsat, May 2, 2020, <https://english.aawsat.com//home/article/2263886/living-conditions-push-lebanese-back-streets-face-masks>

¹⁹ <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>

²⁰ Wafa, April 25, 2020, <http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=2Dcpc7a116872413141a2Dcpc7>

²¹ Xinhua, May 1, 2020, http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2020-05/01/content_75997218.htm



- Israel cracked down on banks in the occupied West Bank for processing payments that the Palestinian Authority distributes to the families of Palestinians who have spent time in Israeli jails.²²

Syria

- The Syrian government ordered the "precautionary seizure "of assets belonging to prominent tycoon Rami Makhlouf, as well as to his wife and children. in addition to a separate order has banned Makhlouf from government contracts for five years.²³
- The Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources has removed subsidies on petrol sold to certain types of vehicles, a measure that will affect around nine percent of the market.
- The Syrian government has announced that it will allocate the equivalent of 11 percent of its budget to purchase the local wheat harvest.²⁴
- President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday 13 May, issued the legislative decree which stipulates for exempting raw materials, imported for local industry, and are subjected to customs' fees of 1 % out of the Customs tariffs.²⁵
- Gold Prices Surge beyond the means of most Syrians to reach a historic peak at s.p 84000/gram.
- The Central Bank of Syria pumped the dollar at a preferential price through some exchange companies, at an intervention price of 1450 Syrian pounds.
- Official Current Exchange Rate SP/USD: 434 - SP/USD-
Current Exchange Rate in Black Market: 1650 - SP/USD

Cyprus

- Cyprus on the 4th of May, began to resume construction and retail businesses, amid government warnings to closely follow health guidelines.²⁶
- Invest Cyprus, the island's investment promotion agency, revealed that 92% of foreign investors were either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the government's handling of corona situation.²⁷

²² NY Times, May 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/world/middleeast/israel-palestinian-inmates-banks.html>

²³ Reuters, May 19, 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-syria-security-tycoon/syrian-government-orders-seizure-of-assets-of-assads-cousin-makhlouf-idUKKBN22V1JD>

²⁴ <https://www.syria-report.com/news/13>

²⁵ Sana, May 13, 2020, <https://www.sana.sy/en/?p=191590>

²⁶ Financial Mirror, May 4, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/05/04/covid19-cyprus-economy-begins-to-unlock/>

²⁷ International Investment, May 4, 2020, <https://www.internationalinvestment.net/news/4014748/foreign-investors-highly-satisfied-cyprus-gov-covid-19-response-plan>



- University of Cyprus (UCY) economists expect the island's economy will shrink by 6.9- 13.1 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to covid-19.²⁸
- The government issued a scheme which aims to help 40,000 struggling businesses with cash and tax incentives. The total amount of loans that will be issued is up to 1.5 billion Euros.
- 1. 0858 USD Euro official currency value²⁹

3. The Corona Situation (Up until May 31)

Egypt

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 24,985 corona confirmed cases
 - 6,810 recovered
 - 959 deaths
-
- The Egyptian government received the third batch of medical aid which contains 35 tons of equipment from China.³⁰
 - Egypt's Ministry of Health issued nine rules forming part of the country's "coexistence plan" to deal with the novel coronavirus pandemic.³¹
 - 6 Egyptian judges and a member of parliament have contracted the covid-19 virus.³²

²⁸ The National Herald,

https://www.thenationalherald.com/cyprus_economy/arthro/no_covid_19_recovery_plan_eu_dithers_cyprus_tourism_withers-294687/

²⁹ https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html

³⁰ Xinhuanet, May 16, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/16/c_139062216.htm

³¹ Egypt Independent, May 14, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/egypts-ministry-of-health-sets-nine-rules-as-part-of-coexistence-plan-with-coronavirus-pandemic/>

³² Egypt Independent, May 15, 2020, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/six-egyptian-judges-public-prosecutors-contract-covid-19/>



Jordan

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 739 corona confirmed cases
 - 522 recovered
 - 9 deaths
-
- Health minister Saad Jaber declared that his government has the coronavirus under control due to the adequate measures being taken.³³
 - The Jordanian Ministry of Education finalized its COVID-19 response plan focusing on distance learning.
 - Tear fund assisted 614 Syrian families and 253 Jordanian families under the COVID-19 Emergency response plan.³⁴

Iraq

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 6,439 corona confirmed cases
 - 3,156 recovered
 - 205 deaths
-
- To combat the pandemic, The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, delivered hygiene, disinfectants sprayers and Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) to the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), and the KRG Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (MoAWR) in the presence of representatives of both ministries' officials and FAO.³⁵
 - Iraq ordered a lockdown in six districts in the capital Baghdad to prevent the spread of coronavirus.³⁶

³³ Arab News, May 1, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1667801/middle-east>

³⁴ UNHCR, May, 2020, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/76184>

³⁵ Relief Web, May 22, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/fao-iraq-hands-over-hygiene-sprayers-disinfectants-and-personal-protection-equipment>

³⁶ Anadolu Agency, May 18, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/iraq-locks-down-6-districts-in-baghdad-to-stem-virus/1845104#>



- The Iraqi Health Ministry, declared that further health preventive measures will be taken after the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, including maintaining the partial curfew to curb the spread of coronavirus pandemic.³⁷

Lebanon

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 1,220 corona confirmed cases
 - 712 recovered
 - 27 deaths
-
- The Minister of Public health Hamad Hasan claimed that despite the dramatic increase in cases, there is no virus "community spread" in the country, as most of them were reported in towns of Majdal Anjar and Mazboud and in two buildings inhabited by foreign workers in Beirut's Ras al-Nabaa area.³⁸
 - The head of the Parliamentary Health Committee Assem Araji warned that the number of infected in Lebanon can be much higher.³⁹
 - Being the fifth time the government has extended the lockdown, Lebanon has prolonged the "state of general mobilization" until June 7 after an increase in daily coronavirus cases.⁴⁰

Palestine

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 448 corona confirmed cases
- 368 recovered
- 3 deaths

³⁷ Xinhuanet, May 24, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/25/c_139084662.htm

³⁸ Naharnet, May 22, 2020, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/272037-hasan-corona-numbers-shocking-but-no-community-spread>

³⁹ Im Lebanon, May 18, 2020, <https://www.imlebanon.org/2020/05/18/assem-araji-13>

⁴⁰ Arab News, May 22, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1678346/middle-east>



- The UAE dispatched 14 tons of aid for Palestinians to help in fighting coronavirus.⁴¹
- \$2.5 million worth of medical supplies were sent by Saudi Arabia, with its charity arm King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief), to Palestine.⁴²
- UNRWA made an appeal for 93.4 million USD to respond to COVID-19 in the areas of health care, sanitation and hygiene and education over the next three months⁴³

Syria

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 122 corona confirmed cases
 - 46 recovered
 - 5 deaths
-
- The Health Ministry decided to lift the lockdown on al-Sayyeda Zainab area in Damascus countryside after conducting coronavirus tests and not registering any new infection since May 2nd.⁴⁴
 - Despite the relaxations of precautionary measures, during the reporting period, the Government of Syria (GoS) indicated that a “full curfew” remained possible, should factors related to the virus necessitate it.⁴⁵
 - The Ministry of Awqaf announced the opening of mosques for Friday prayers only, as of Friday 8 May, with the continuation of the suspension of the rest of the congregational prayers temporarily.

⁴¹ Wall Street Journal, May 1, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-a-e-flies-coronavirus-aid-for-palestinians-in-first-known-commercial-flight-to-israel-11589920895>

⁴² Arab News, May 2, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1668381/saudi-arabia>

⁴³ Relief Web, May, 8, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/unrwa-launches-new-coronavirus-us-934-million-emergency-appeal>

⁴⁴ Sana, May 2, 2020, <https://www.sana.sy/en/?p=191883>

⁴⁵ Ocha, May 16, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria_COVID-19_Humanitarian%20Update%20No.%2010_16May2020_FINAL.pdf



Cyprus

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 944 corona confirmed cases
 - 790 recovered
 - 17 deaths
-
- Cyprus extended its ban on commercial flights until May 28 due to the corona situation.⁴⁶
 - Cyprus launched a voluntary tracking app that locates people who may have come into contact with someone who has Covid-19.⁴⁷
 - During May, Cyprus decided to ease its lockdown due to the dramatic drop of new corona cases.⁴⁸

4. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated)

Egypt

- During a virtual conference Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry assured that refugees within Egypt were not repatriated to their countries.⁴⁹
- According to a new UNHCR report, a total of 54 Post Office branches in Egypt were enabled with biometric technologies allowing as many as 14,734 refugees or IDPs to be approved for biometric authentication.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ The National Herald, May 12, 2020, https://www.thenationalherald.com/cyprus_economy/arthro/covid_19_effect_crushing_cyprus_economy_jitters_remain-297431/

⁴⁷ Euro News, May 2, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/05/02/coronavirus-cyprus-launches-voluntary-tracking-app-to-halt-spread>

⁴⁸ Financial Mirror, May 14, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/05/14/covid19-cyprus-cases-nearing-zero-as-lockdown-eased/>

⁴⁹ Xinhua Net, April 28, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/28/c_139015868.htm

⁵⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/getinvolved/fundraising/5ea2aa834/q1-donor-impact-report.html>



Jordan

The UNHCR states that there are currently 656,733 registered refugees in Jordan up until the beginning of May.

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

- 193,781 in Amman Governorate (29.5 %)
 - 162,551 in Mafraq Governorate (24.8%)
 - 134,774 in Irbid Governorate (20.5%)
 - 95,266 in Zarqa Governorate (14.5%)
 - 18,574 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
 - 13,071 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
 - 9,279 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
 - 8,453 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
 - 8,359 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
 - 6,538 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)
 - 3,648 in Aqaba Governorate (0.6%)
 - 1,716 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)
- UNHCR completed its regular combined April/May basic needs cash assistance for 33,000 beneficiary families.
 - On 11th of May, the UNHCR declared a new set of measures allowing one-time emergency cash assistance to refugees.⁵¹
 - Amnesty International issued a statement that the government should allow urgent medical care for displaced Syrians in Rukban during COVID-19 pandemic.⁵²

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%)

⁵¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/jo/13189-unhcr-begins-distribution-of-emergency-cash-assistance-appeals-for-79-million.html>

⁵² Amnesty, May 7, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/jordan-authorities-must-allow-urgent-medical-care-for-displaced-syrians-in-rukban-during-covid19/>



- 31,533 in Sulaymaniyah (12.7%)
- 1,140 in Anbar (0.4%)
- 1,797 in other areas (0.7%)⁵³

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

- The UNDP issued an emergency livelihood cluster response to resume activities stopped during the lockdown.⁵⁴
- The EU dispatched 2.8 million USD to relieve Iraqi children in emergency camps.⁵⁵
- The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) are increasing their collaboration to reach 76,000 refugees and 280,000 IDPs by appealing for US\$26 million and US\$31.9 million respectively.⁵⁶

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%)⁵⁷
- The Palestine Red Crescent Society distributed food parcels composed of 1000 packages in Al Jalil refugee camp near Baalbek, in cooperation with partner institutions.⁵⁸
 - The WFP (World Food Program) published a study which will allow the organization and partners to set the minimum expenditure basket for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.⁵⁹

⁵³ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

⁵⁴ OCHA, May 20, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/covid-19-emergency-livelihoods-cluster-response>

⁵⁵ Relief Web, May 21, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/eu-s-contribution-usd28-million-provided-relief-iraqi-children-emergency-camps-enar>

⁵⁶ Relief Web, May 13, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unhcr-and-wfp-extend-assistance-net-cover-displaced-and-refugee-families-affected>

⁵⁷ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

⁵⁸ OCHA, May 12, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/prcs-mobilized-assist-palestinian-communities-lebanon>

⁵⁹ OCHA, May 12, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/minimum-expenditure-basket-syrian-refugees-lebanon-rights-based-versus-expenditure>



- To ensure uninterrupted delivery of critical assistance and services to the refugees and host communities, UN and partners in Lebanon launched an Emergency Appeal requesting for US\$350 million to respond to the immediate impact of COVID-19.⁶⁰

Syria

- According to preliminary estimates, 9.3 million people in Syria are now considered food insecure; an increase of 1.4 million in the past six months. While, Prior to the COVID-19 crisis- an estimated 80 per cent of people in Syria already lived below the poverty line, with high and increasing levels of food insecurity.
- The UN's top aid official has urged the Security Council to renew a mechanism that provides lifesaving assistance in northwest Syria, through cross-border deliveries from Turkey.⁶¹
- On 22 May, a Windstorm struck refugee camps in Al-Sheikh Bahr area in western Idlib which damaged over 125 tents and burning 40 tents on May 16, in al-Baraka camp in Deir Hassan area in Idlib countryside. No casualties were reported. Meanwhile, more than 100 families have fled for fear of spreading of fire to nearby tents.⁶²
- The Syria Cross Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) has launched a US\$ 75 million allocation. The allocation strategy takes into account the fact that needs with longer term impacts are increasing as displacement becomes more protracted, and aims to address all needs through immediate and medium-term interventions.
- Sporadic water shortages disrupt daily life and weaken people's ability to take basic hygiene precautions against COVID-19 in Hassekeh, Deir Ezzor, and Raqqa governorates. In Raqqa, people receive water once a week from the main water station, while in Hassakeh, the Allouk water station, which has experienced numerous disruptions, is the only source for drinking water for approximately 800,000 people.

Cyprus

- 600 refugees at Kokkinotrimithia reception center in Pournara began a hunger strike to denounce living conditions and overcrowding.⁶³

⁶⁰ OCHA, May 8, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/un-and-partners-lebanon-launch-emergency-appeal-requesting-us350-million-respond>

⁶¹ UN, May 19, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064432>

⁶² Syria HR, May 22, 2020, <https://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=166018>

⁶³ Cyprus Mail, May 5, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/05/05/refugees-at-kokkinotrimithia-reception-centre-go-on-hunger-strike/>



- The UNHCR declared that it is pleased with the government's measures taken to improve the living conditions of asylum seekers and hoped other measures will be introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁴
- An online petition demanding for the halt of forcing refugees out of the country, was posted on change.org and is harnessing a growing audience.⁶⁵

5. CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Egypt

- Patriarch Ibrahim Isaac Sedrak, the Patriarch of the Egyptian Catholic Church, condemned the terrorist attack orchestrated by the Islamic State overnight on the 30th of April against the Egyptian army in North Sinai.⁶⁶
- Under the instructions of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Holy See of St. Mark, the Egyptian Coptic Church allowed marriages to take place in churches and homes during the Holy Fifties period, while setting a condition of 6 invitees only.⁶⁷
- Egypt's Catholic Synod extended the suspension of masses nationwide in light of efforts to curb the outbreak new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Financial Mirror, April 28, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/04/28/covid19-unhcr-welcomes-improve-living-conditions-for-asylum-seekers/>

⁶⁵ Cyprus Mail, April 26, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/26/petition-to-stop-forcible-deportation-of-migrants/>

⁶⁶ Asia News, May 2, 2020, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Egyptian-Church-condemns-Islamic-State-attack-on-soldiers-in-North-Sinai-49974.html>

⁶⁷ Egypt Today, May 1, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/85289/Pope-Tawadros-Marriage-prayers-allowed-at-churches-homes-with-6>

⁶⁸ Egypt Today, May 10, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/86620/Egypt%E2%80%99s-Catholic-Synod-extends-suspension-of-masses-nationwide>



Jordan

- The parish of the Latins in Naour, the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, lit up with the Jordanian flag near the church, in fulfillment of the homeland and a greeting to the leader and everyone who sincerely works for human health and life.⁶⁹
- His Eminence Ibrahim Isaac, the Catholic Patriarch of the Copts, participated on the 5th of May in the Holy Rosary with the "Saint Charbel" family in Jordan.⁷⁰

Iraq

- His Beatitude Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, invited Muslims and Christians to jointly pray on the 14th of May, so that "everyone can live in peace, security, stability and joy".⁷¹
- Several Catholic aid agencies have increased their support to those displaced in northern Iraq, in response to the covid-19 pandemic. It is reported that great gains have been achieved on the humanitarian front.⁷²

Lebanon

- The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, contacted the Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab, and confirmed his support for the national directions taken by the government. The patriarch also affirmed support for the approach that relies on efficiency and integrity in administrative appointments.⁷³
- HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, during a ceremonial address, assured to the attendees that the government is prepared to make modifications to its economic plan, taking into account the wellbeing of the Lebanese citizens and the International Monetary Fund.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Albawab News, May 3, 2020, <https://www.albawabnews.com/4003406>

⁷⁰ Alwafd, May 5, 2020, <https://m.alwafd.news>

⁷¹ Asia News, May 12, 2020, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Card.-Sako:-Covid-19,-Iraqi-Christians-and-Muslims-in-prayer-with-the-Pope-and-the-imam-50057.html>

⁷² Crux Now, May 6, 2020, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-middle-east/2020/05/church-agencies-in-northern-iraq-reach-those-who-need-help-with-covid-19/>

⁷³ Al jaded TV, May 7, 2020, <https://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/news/local/0705202022>

⁷⁴ Alnour, May 10, 2020, <http://www.alnour.com.lb/news/politics/418731>



- In a statement ordained by HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, Melkite Roman Catholics religious services will resume in churches with the participation of worshipers, starting from May 10.⁷⁵

Palestine

- HE Atallah Hanna demanded on the 29th of April during a meeting with the Orthodox parish in Jerusalem,, churches be opened soon, with precautionary measures.⁷⁶
- HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, called for joint national action to thwart Israel's annexation project in the occupied West Bank and all conspiracies aimed at liquidating the Palestinian cause.⁷⁷

Syria

- On the 10th of May, churches within Syria reopened for masses and for the attendance of church believers while abiding to state precautionary measures.⁷⁸
- His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church celebrated the Holy Qurobo at St. Mary Church in Damascus, on the occasion of the Feast of the Blessing of the Virgin Mary on the Crops.⁷⁹

Cyprus

- HB Archbishop Chrysostomos, head of the Church of Cyprus, announced that church services would resume with doors open but limited to 10 parishioners at a time on the 2nd of May. He assured President Nicos Anastasiades that churches will follow the strict public health and hygiene guidelines for reopening after the coronavirus lockdown.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Mobtada, May 8, 2020, <https://www.mobtada.com/details/931741>

⁷⁶ Alwatan Voice, April 29, 2020, <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2020/04/29/1333318.html>

⁷⁷ Altahrir, May 20, 2020, <https://altahrir.wordpress.com/2020/05/10/hanna-calls-for-national-action-to-foil-israels-annexation-plan/>

⁷⁸ Sputnik, May 10, 2020, https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_world/202005101045398625

⁷⁹ <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/>

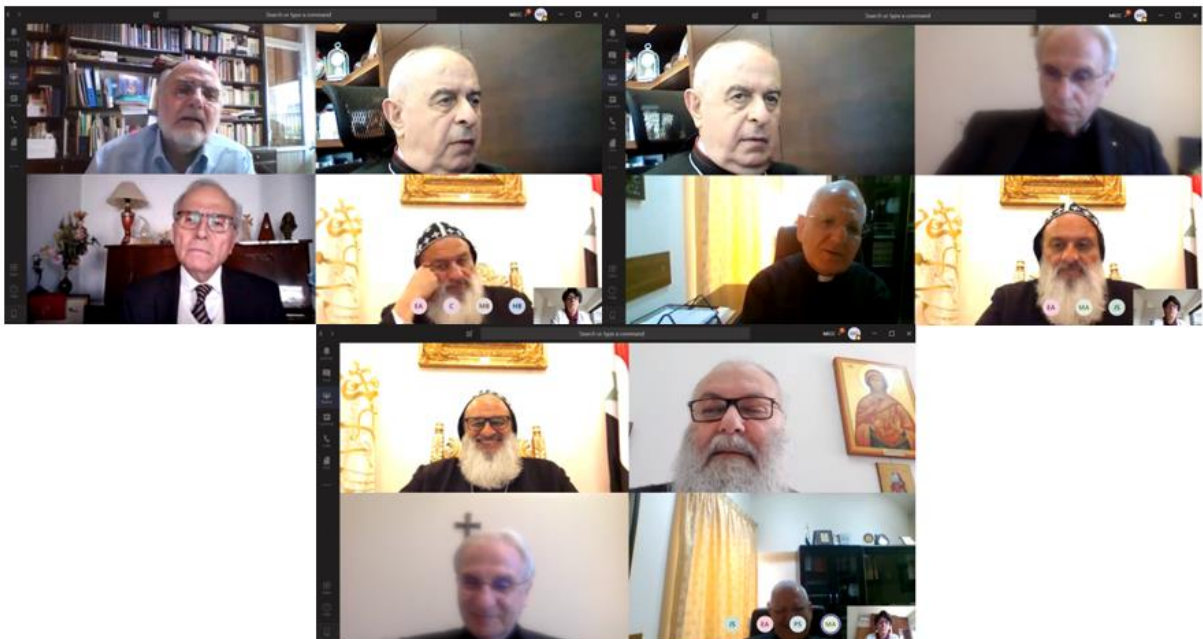
⁸⁰ Pappas Post, May 2, 2020, <https://www.pappaspost.com/churches-to-open-in-cyprus-may-4th-with-limits-communion-to-resume/>



- Pope Francis, during a discussion over the phone with President Nicos Anastasiades, affirmed that he will visit Cyprus post-lockdown.⁸¹

6. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

MECC's Presidents Meeting (May 1, 2020)



Presidents representing MECC's families, on Teams, May 1, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC website.

The MECC member Churches' presidents have responded to the call of Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, for an online meeting, each one from his self-quarantine.

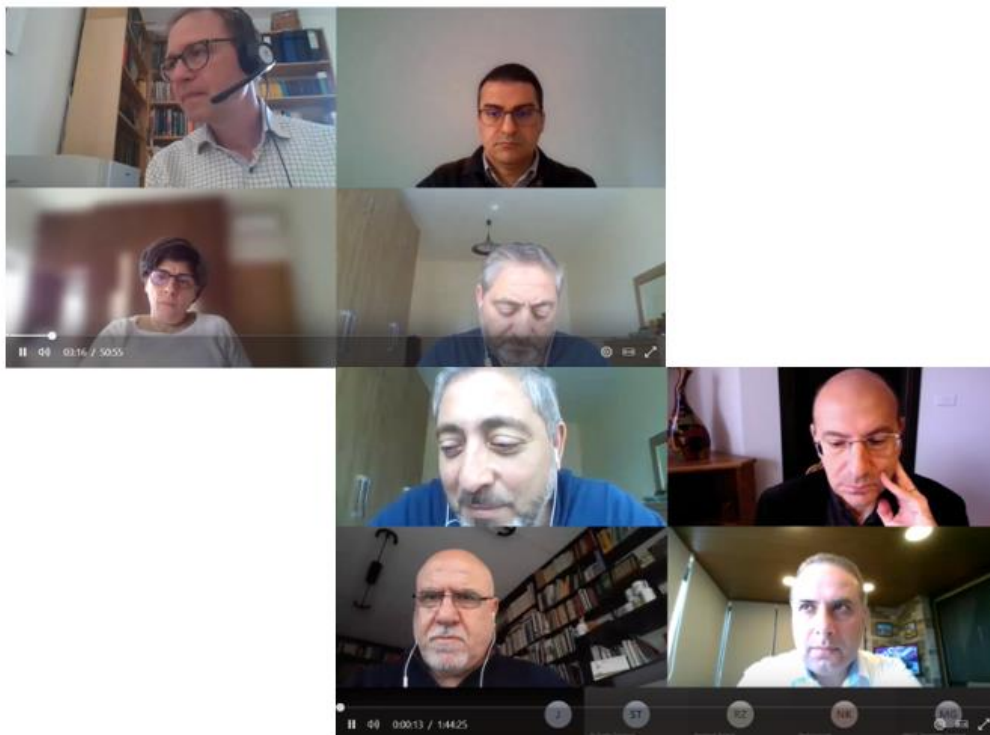
⁸¹ Financial Mirror, May 5, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/05/05/covid19-pope-eager-to-visit-cyprus-post-virus/>



It was attended by His Beatitude Youhanna X Yazigi, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and MECC President of the Council for the Orthodox Family, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church, and MECC President for the Eastern Orthodox Family, His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans and MECC President for the Catholic Family, and Right Reverend Dr. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon and MECC President Council for the Evangelical Family.

The meeting was also attended by the members of the Council's Strategic Support Group, namely, His Excellency Bishop Paul Sayah, Dr. Jean Salmanian and Dr. Michel Abs. It aimed at discussing the council's issues and the challenges that the member Churches and citizens in the region are facing during the current situations.

MECC's KAIROS Meeting (May 2020)



Attendees of the KAIROS meetings via Teams, May, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC Website.



Despite its widespread outbreak around the world, the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) did not hinder the work of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical department (TED) who was determined to continue the “Kairos Middle East Towards Churches Global Compact” process online.

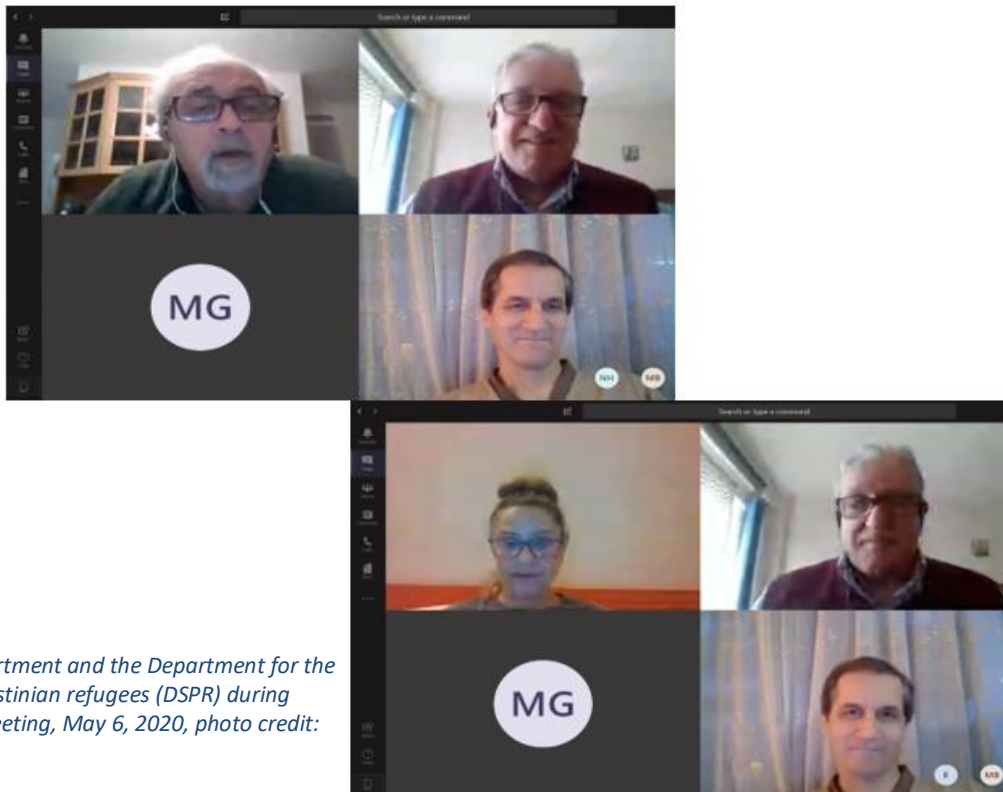
In fact, the fifth consultation seminar was expected to be held between the 12th and 14th of March 2020 in Egypt; therefore, the organizing committee decided to turn the event into an online seminar instead of cancelling it. After the experts filled a survey prepared by the committee, the meeting was set to be held after the 30th of April 2020. In addition, the drafting committee in charge of writing the final white paper was formed.

As for the international partners’ meeting that was expected to take place in Berlin, it was postponed to a later date after an online meeting with the secretary of the German Bishops' Conference. During the meeting, the partners were supposed to give their feedback on the final text.

It is worth noting that the TED department previously organized 4 consultation seminars in Bethania, focusing on the Christian presence and role in the Middle East on both theological and geopolitical levels.



Working together despite the distance (May 6, 2020)



Diakonia department and the Department for the Service of Palestinian refugees (DSPR) during their online meeting, May 6, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

Through their ongoing activities, the Diakonia department and the Department for the Service of Palestinian refugees (DSPR) continue to serve the weak and the poor, especially during this exceptional period resulting from the widespread outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and its economic and social repercussions on the Middle East. In order to enhance the coordination and complementarity between both departments, an online meeting was held yesterday and gathered their directors and coordinators from Syria, Lebanon and the Holy Land.



WCC and MECC Joint Letter to the European Union (May 11, 2020)



**World Council
of Churches**



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

WCC and MECC logos, May 11, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

Geneva, May 8, 2020

To:

Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Austria: Alexander Schallenberg, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Belgium: Philippe Goffin, Minister for Foreign Affairs and of Defence

Bulgaria: Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Croatia: Gordan Grlić Radman, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

Cyprus: Nikos Christodoulides, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Czechia: Tomáš Petříček, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Denmark: Jeppe Kofod, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia: Urmas Reinsalu, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Finland: Pekka Olavi Haavisto, Minister for Foreign Affairs

France: Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs

Germany: Heiko Maas, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Greece: Nikos Dendias, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hungary: Péter Szijjártó, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Ireland: Simon Coveney, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Italy: Luigi Di Maio, Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation

Latvia: Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Lithuania: Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Luxembourg: Jean Asselborn, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

Malta: Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

Netherlands: Stef Blok, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Poland: Jacek Czaputowicz, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Portugal: Augusto Santos Silva, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Romania: Bogdan Aurescu, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Slovakia: Ivan Korčok, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs

Slovenia: Anže Logar, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Spain: Arancha González Laya, Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation

Sweden: Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Iceland: Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Norway: Ine Eriksen Søreide, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Switzerland: Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Your Excellencies,

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) appeal for a firm and principled stance by the European Union against any annexation by the State of Israel of occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank. Any such annexation would constitute a grave violation of international law and, as UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov has observed, "deal a devastating blow to the two-state solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations, and threaten efforts to advance regional peace."

We concur with the statement by Dr Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, that the looming annexation is "a political litmus test for the international community", and that it "will not be reversed through rebukes". We appreciate High Representative Josep Borrell's clear affirmation that the EU does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Palestinian territory and that it will "continue to closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and will act accordingly".

Accordingly, the WCC and the MECC are calling on the EU to ensure that any such annexation is met with real consequences, at least commensurate with those adopted by the EU in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea.

In addition, in case the State of Israel proceeds with the planned annexation, the EU must surely suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement. Article 2 of the Agreement states that relations between the EU and Israel must "be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles". Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty states that the Union's external actions must be guided by the principles of fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity, democracy, the rule of law, the UN Charter and international law. For the sake of the EU's credibility and accountability to its own fundamental principles, it must enforce conditionality clauses such as Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, and suspend the Agreement in the event of the threatened annexation.

The WCC and the MECC are committed to the vision of a just peace for all people in the Holy Land. But the unilateral annexation of yet more of the territory that remains to Palestinians cannot lead to justice or to peace, but only to greater injustice, dispossession, escalating tensions, regional destabilization, and the



further erosion of respect for international law. The EU must not be complicit – by inaction or inadequate reaction – in this outcome.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca

Dr.Souraya Bechealany

Acting General Secretary

Secretary General

World Council of Churches

Middle East Council of Churches

Dr Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General: the 14th of May 2020 will be a Global Day dedicated for Prayer and Fasting; the MECC is entrusted with the task of ensuring that prayer is accompanied by words and deeds (May 12, 2020)



Dr Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, during her interview on OTV, May 12, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.



Dr Souraya Bechealany, the Middle East Council of Churches' Secretary General, was the guest of a program broadcasted on OTV and entitled "Yawm Jadid", which means in English "New Day". During the online interview on Skype, Bechealany highlighted the joint appeal issued by 17 Lebanese faith-based organizations, in response to the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's latest initiative, launched under the patronage of his Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. She explained that this initiative calls on people, from all over the world, to dedicate the 14th of May 2020 to prayer, fasting, invocation and charity.

In addition, Dr. Bechealany stated that "since its foundation in 1974, the Middle East Council of Churches made a decision to help all people regardless of their religion, race or origin". She insisted that "Valuing human brotherhood and standing by each other no matter the circumstances are of the utmost importance", noting that "the council vowed to combine prayer with words and deeds".

Interview with Fr. Gaby Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department on Voice of All Lebanon, to discuss about the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's appeal (May 12, 2020)



Interview with Fr. Gaby Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department on Voice of All Lebanon radio station, May 12, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.



Interview with Fr. Gaby Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department on Voice of All Lebanon radio station, with the journalist Johnny Sadiq. The discussion was about the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's appeal to observe the 14th of May 2020 as a day of joint prayer, fasting and good deeds between Christians and Muslims, asking for God's help in overcoming the Coronavirus pandemic.

Sr. Emilie Tannous, the coordinator of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department, highlighted on Voice of Van and MTV the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's appeal (May 12, 2020)



Interviews with Sr. Emily Tannous, the coordinator of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department on Voice of Van and on MTV, May 12, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.



Sr. Emily Tannous, the coordinator of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department, was the guest of "Kel Yowm bi Ywomu" program on Voice of Van radio station, and the guest of "Alive" program on MTV. The discussions were about the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's appeal to observe the 14th of May 2020 as a day of joint prayer, fasting and good deeds between Christians and Muslims, asking for God's help in overcoming the Coronavirus pandemic.

Link to the Voice of Van's interview: <https://bit.ly/3dFAOt2>

Link to the MTV's interview: <https://www.facebook.com/mtvlebanon/videos/228565275108864/>

MECC In Response to the Global Initiative for "Human Fraternity": On the 14th of May, let us pray together as Christians and Muslims! (May 13, 2020)

The poster features the MECC logo on the left and the Human Fraternity Meeting logo on the right. The central text is in Arabic, reading: "الدعاء المشترك" (Joint Prayer). The text below is a prayer: "ربنا، إله العظيم برحمته، إنا برحمتك نستغيث، ربنا نجنا من كل مرض وجائحة ووباء خبيث، وانظر برأفة إلى عبادك المصابين بهذا الوباء والممتحنين به، ربنا هب القوة والشفاء للمرضى والمتألمين، والعزاء للمحزونين، ربنا مد يد العون إلى الأطباء والمسعفين والمرضى والعاملين في المختبرات ليصلوا إلى الترياق الشافي لهذا الوباء، ربنا أجزل بعطائك المحرومين والجائعين، وألهم المسؤولين سواء السبيل لخير العالم والإنسانية جمعاء، وضع في قلوب المقتدرين السخاء على المعوزين والمتضايقين، ربنا إنا اعتصمنا بك، وتوكلنا عليك أنت الحي الذي لا يموت، ربنا إصرف عنا هذا الوباء، برحمتك يا أرحم الراحمين، بما أنك على كل شيء قدير، آمين". At the bottom, the website www.MECC.org and Facebook page www.facebook.com/MiddleEastCouncilOfChurches are listed.

Joint prayer in response to the Global Initiative for "Human Fraternity", May 14, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC Facebook page.



In response to the call made by Pope Francis, Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayeb to set aside the fourteenth, and Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's latest initiative The Middle East Council of Churches renews its appeal for people to actively participate tomorrow, on the 14th of May 2020, in a day of prayer, fasting, invocation, and charity, each according to his/her own religion or sect or belief, asking God to help us overcome the Corona pandemic which is threatening the lives of millions of people, to inspire scientists to discover the appropriate cure, and to save the world from the medical, economic, and human consequences of this detrimental virus.

This initiative launched under the patronage of his Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, was adopted by 17 faith-based Christian and Muslim organizations in Lebanon and the Arab World.

The Middle East Council of Churches sees this initiative as a new opportunity to confirm that "human fraternity" stems from our brotherhood in Christ and that spiritual solidarity can be lived through prayer and fasting.

Therefore, as an expression of our national unity, our religious social responsibility, and our global fraternal human solidarity, especially in these hard times that Lebanon is passing through,

Let us unite tomorrow, as Muslims and Christians, in one voice and one heart, and present our prayers and invocations to God Almighty, each in his/her own way following his/her own traditions, asking Him to preserve mankind and to help it overcome this pandemic, while joining the initiatives that will be launched by faith-based organizations and broadcasted in the media and on social media platforms.

We also reiterate the call of the Committee, "doubling our individual and institutional efforts in helping those in need and securing necessary aid for them, starting with donating a value of money equivalent to what we would usually spend during a non-fasting day to the people most in need around us, and inviting everyone – each according to his/her own abilities – to contribute in supporting humanitarian initiatives, and ending with the commitment of our institutions to multiply their efforts and increase their assistance in this field without distinction between people, since human fraternity forbids us to remain indifferent to those who are hungry or in need".

All the world today is in the same boat, so tomorrow, let us unite in prayer and ask God to have mercy on his children so that we survive this pandemic together!



Interview with Dr Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, on Radio Free Lebanon to discuss about the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's appeal (May 15, 2020)



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

الأمينة العامة لمجلس كنائس
الشرق الأوسط
د. ثريا بشعلاني في مقابلة
على إذاعة لبنان الحرّ في برنامج
"بشر مش حجر" مع الإعلامية
جنى غازي

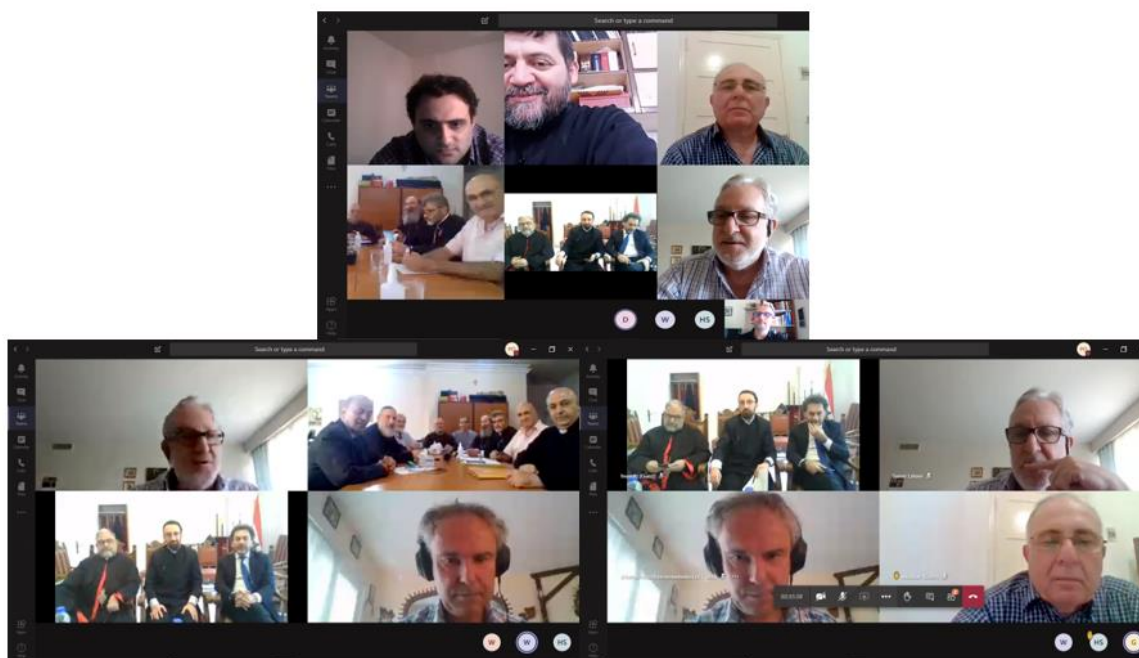


Interview with Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General on Radio Free Lebanon (RLL), May 15, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC Website.

Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, was the guest of "Bachar Mech Hajar" program on Radio Free Lebanon (RLL), with the journalist Jana Ghazi to discuss the joint appeal issued by 17 Lebanese faith-based organizations, in response to the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity's latest initiative, launched under the patronage of his Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. Dr. Bechealany highlighted how Christians and Muslims united on the 14th of May 2020 in prayer, fasting, invocation and charity.



The "Restoration Fund for rehabilitation of faith-based social services & religious infrastructure damaged during the crisis in Syria" program was launched on the practical level despite the Coronavirus Pandemic (May 19, 2020)



Practical and technical launch of the "Restoration Fund for rehabilitation of faith-based social services & religious infrastructure damaged during the crisis in Syria", May 19, 2020, Photo Credit: MECC Website.

The Steering Committee of the "Restoration Fund for rehabilitation of faith-based social services & religious infrastructure damaged during the crisis in Syria" held an online meeting that gathered the representatives of the participating churches, representatives of Kerk in Actie (KiA) – Netherlands, which is the donor of the program, and senior officials from the General Secretariat of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC).

The official launching of the program was postponed due to the exceptional circumstances resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and the quarantine. However, these though conditions did not preclude the practical and technical launch of the program which goal is to contribute towards the holistic recovery of local communities by restoring and



rehabilitating their places of worship as well as faith-based education, health and community facilities damaged by the conflict, and to guarantee the return of affected communities to their areas of residence, work and schools.

MECC Resumes capacity building trainings (May 20, 2020)



MECC team resumes capacity building trainings through online sessions, May 20 2020, photo credit: MECC website.

MECC team underwent an online training focusing on transformational and motivational leadership organized by the Institute for Leadership Development and the Bible Society. It was heartwarming to see how, during these difficult times, capacity-building sessions such as this, draw the team members together and motivate them to keep on working and overcoming all obstacles.



7. MECC Humanitarian activities May 2020

Lebanon

- Continued to assist the elderly beneficiaries with the final purchases/exchange of food vouchers by shopping for them.
- Continued distribution of medication particularly to elderly with chronic illnesses who rely on the latter at the end of every month.
- Continued partial cure to cancer patients through purchasing of medication and cycle treatments.
- Provided women empowerment sessions via handicrafts which is important for their mental health. 25 women aged 25 - 60 years, from different nationalities and backgrounds (Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese) started courses (6 sessions completed) in Mount Lebanon – Sad Bauchrieh at the Syriac Orthodox Bishopric. Moreover, 18 women from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon started courses of embroidery in Mount Lebanon – Nabaa Area (6 sessions completed).
- Distribution of vouchers amounting to 150,000 Lebanese Liras each for 150 Lebanese families.



Handicraft sessions in Nabaa and Sad Bauchrieh, May 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.





Helping the Elderly, May 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.

Syria

- Completed the distribution of children clothing kits, school kits and hygiene kits for 1249 students in Damascus rural.
- Completed the tender process to select vocational training and business startup institutes.
- Completed the tender process to purchase 165 home garden seed kits and irrigation tools in Daraa governorate.
- Launched the tender process under livestock activities in Daraa governorate.



- Rehabilitation of WASH facilities in three schools in Rural Damascus in addition to a school in Aleppo in order to improve the hygienic conditions at those establishments.
- Prepared to launch distribution of food and hygiene kits project in Damascus rural.
- Prepared to distribute food vouchers for 140 families in Aleppo.
- Prepared to distribute hygiene kits for 1500 families in Izraa and Daraa.
- Prepared to start cash for work activities in Daraa governorate.



Distribution of clothing, Hygiene and school kits for 1249 students in Damascus rural, May 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.

8. CONCLUSION

Although life is gradually regaining its momentum in the Middle East, there's always the possibility of severe setbacks. Moreover, there is always the threat of armed escalation due to the geo-political aspirations of nations such as the Zionist entity, Israel, to annex territory. Nevertheless, the good thing about COVID-19 is that it has frozen or slowed down the pace of the conflict between Syria and Turkey and decreasing the number of casualties on the frontline.