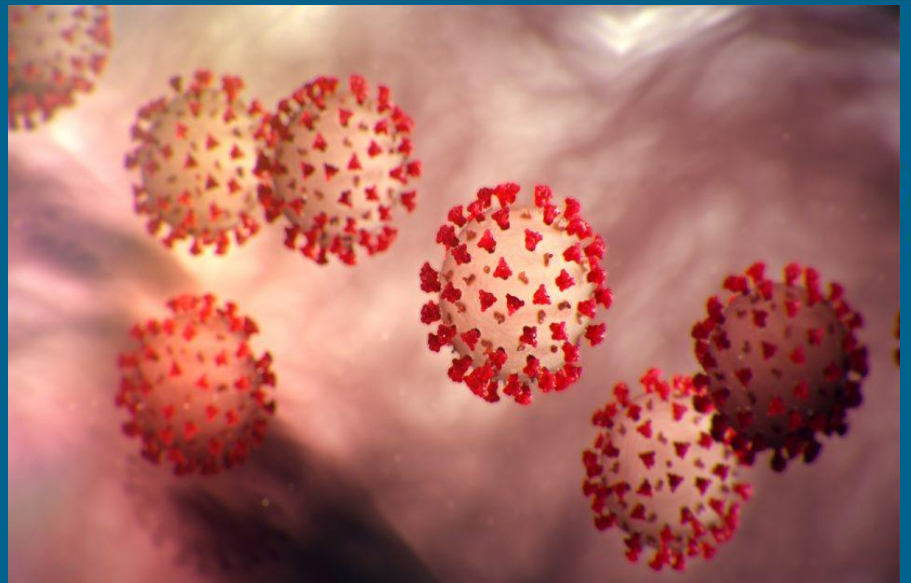




مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط  
The Middle East Council of Churches

# Middle East Overview – September 2020

## Herd Immunity Imminent?



*Corona cases drastically increased during this month in light of exhausted health systems, September 26, 2020, photo credit: Cyprus Mail.*

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## Contents

1. BACKGROUND.....	2
2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION.....	3
Egypt.....	3
Jordan.....	3
Iraq.....	5
Lebanon.....	6
Palestine.....	7
Syria.....	7
Cyprus.....	8
3. The Corona Situation.....	9
Egypt.....	9
Jordan.....	10
Iraq.....	11
Lebanon.....	12
Palestine.....	13
Syria.....	13
Cyprus.....	14
4. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated).....	15
Egypt.....	15
Jordan.....	15
Iraq.....	16
Lebanon.....	17
Syria.....	17
Cyprus.....	18
5. CHURCH ACTIVITIES.....	19
6. MECC Humanitarian activities September 2020:.....	59
7. CONCLUSION.....	64



## 1. Introduction

Parallel to the deterioration of the economic cycle in the Middle East, the region witnesses the resurgence of the corona pandemic. In Jordan for instance, a country which had boasted about its success in containing the virus and almost declaring all-out victory, now fears a grotesque wave of 3000 to 4000 new cases per day. As for Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt the rate of new number of cases is continuously increasing at dangerous levels, further exhausting the already paralyzed health sector. In Cyprus, which is reporting lower numbers of new cases and which had opened the country to boost its tourism sector, suffered a sudden spike in cases which can be fatal to its economy. In Syria, IDP camps prepare themselves for an imminent catastrophe as hospital beds are being scarcer by the day. Given all these indications, are we truly heading towards herd immunity?

This month the MECC, through its Diakonia department has been busy distributing hygiene kits and PPE materials to help in fighting corona. Moreover, the council continues to abide by strict preventive measures issued by the government to curb the spread of the pandemic.



## 2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

### Egypt

- In an attempt to boost the economy, Egypt has doubled down on support for the country's private sector, making 12.6 billion USD of funding available.<sup>1</sup>
- The Department for International Trade at the British Embassy in Cairo organized the first Green Economy webinar for UK businesses in Egypt showcasing commercial opportunities in the country.<sup>2</sup>
- The Abu Dhabi Tourism Investment Company (ADTIC) stated that three of its hotels in Egypt will be refurbished as part of its business recovery plan.<sup>3</sup>
- Moody's gave Egypt a B2 due to its stable outlook and the government's ability to adopt successful economic and financial policies.<sup>4</sup>
- 15.8094 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.<sup>5</sup>



*Moody's gave a Egypt a stable B2, September 2 2020, photo credit: Reuters.*

### Jordan

- Three MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding) were signed between Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation (JEDCO) and investment banking services companies. The step will create 21 new investment opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arabian Business, September 11, 2020, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/banking-finance/451710-egypt-doubles-private-sector-funding-as-coronavirus-crisis-continues-to-bite>

<sup>2</sup> UK gov, September 10, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-businesses-egypt-government-discuss-green-economy-investment>

<sup>3</sup> Arab News, September 11, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1732801/business-economy>

<sup>4</sup> Egypt Today, September 3, 2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/3/91597/Moody-s-rating-reflects-confidence-on-Egypt-s-economy-Finance>

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

<sup>6</sup> Salaam, September 9, 2020, <https://www.salaamgateway.com/story/agreements-signed-to-link-jordan-food-sector-smes-to-investment-funds>



- Jordan instated compulsory military service for men between 25 and 29 as unemployment rises.<sup>7</sup>
- The government reopened the main airport after 6 months of lockdown.<sup>8</sup>
- To ease the economic impact of the pandemic, the AMF (Arab Monetary Fund) extended a loan worth 41 million USD.<sup>9</sup>
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.<sup>10</sup>



*Jordanian soldiers in an armored personal carrier (APC) in Amman, March 18, 2020, photo credit: Getty images.*

<sup>7</sup> Al-Monitor, Sept 10, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/09/jordan-military-service-unemployment-coronavirus-tourism.html>

<sup>8</sup> Arab News, September 8, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1731611/middle-east>

<sup>9</sup> The National, Sept 10, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/amf-extends-loan-facility-worth-41m-to-jordan-to-ease-covid-19-economic-impact-1.1075644>

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



## Iraq

- Iraq's cabinet approved loans given to it by China and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, a total of \$78,539,000 loan by China to the Iraqi national electricity company was authorized.<sup>11</sup>
- A meeting was held between Iraq's ambassador to Cairo with Egypt's ministers of housing, investment, industry, and international cooperation to discuss the participation of Egyptian companies in the ongoing reconstruction of Iraq.<sup>12</sup>
- According to the Iraqi oil minister, Iraq is in talks with Italian company ENI to build a 300,000 b/d refinery at an estimated cost of \$4 billion near the Zubair oil field.<sup>13</sup>
- Iraq, Jordan and Egypt signed an agreement that would expand a pipeline to transport Iraqi oil from Basra to Egypt, through Jordan. The project is seen by economic expert Abdel Rahman al-Mashhady as a salvation for the economy.<sup>14</sup>
- 1193.79 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.<sup>15</sup>



*Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi in Baghdad, Iraq on 6 May 2020 photo credit: Anadolu Agency*

<sup>11</sup> Middle East Monitor, September 10, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200910-iraq-approves-loans-from-saudi-arabia-china/>

<sup>12</sup> Ahram, September 8, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1202/379609/AIAhram-Weekly/Economy/Investing-in-Iraq.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> Hellenic Shipping News, September 10, 2020, <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/iraq-in-talks-with-italys-eni-to-build-4-billion-refinery-near-zubair-field-oil-minister/>

<sup>14</sup> Sputnik News, September, 11, 2020, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/202009111080419419-iraq-egypt-oil-pipeline-through-jordan-breath-of-fresh-air-for-iraqi-economy/>

<sup>15</sup> Central Bank of Iraq, September 23, 2020, <http://www.cbiraq.org/DataValues.aspx?dtFrm=10/31/2003&dtTo=02/18/2019&tmId=175&dtformat=MMM,yyyy>





## Lebanon

- According to Bloomberg magazine, Lebanon is heading towards 65% haircut on foreign-currency debt and a 20% write-off of local notes.<sup>16</sup>
- The United States imposed sanctions on two former Prime Ministers Yusuf Finyanus and Ali Hassan Khalil, because of corruption allegations.<sup>17</sup>
- After the resignation of the government, political parties still quarreled about forming a new government without reaching any common consensus.
- President Michel Aoun, during a press conference at the presidential palace, claimed that the country will “go to hell” unless a new government is formed.<sup>18</sup>
- President Michel Aoun and caretaker Minister Hassan Diab convened to discuss the situation of the dwindling dollar reserves. Experts claim that the government will stop supporting medicine, oil, and flour causing their respective prices to hike up.<sup>19</sup>
- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.<sup>20</sup>



*A handout picture provided by the Lebanese photo agency Dalati and Nohra on September 21, 2020, shows President Michel Aoun talking to the press at the presidential palace in Baabda, east of the capital, regarding ongoing consultations to form a new cabinet. (AFP)*

<sup>16</sup> Bloomberg, September 4, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-04/citigroup-projects-65-lebanon-haircut-in-favorable-scenario>

<sup>17</sup> Al Monitor, September 9, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/09/lebanon-sanctions-finyanus-khalil-beirut-hezbollah-oort.html>

<sup>18</sup> Arab News, September 22, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1737736/middle-east>

<sup>19</sup> Lebanon 24, September 23, 2020, <https://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/748703/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>



## Palestine

- The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) released in a statement that it is concerned about Palestine's economy due to covid-19 and Israel's lockdown measures.<sup>21</sup>
- In a report by UNCTAD, the annual leakage of Palestinian fiscal resources to the Israeli treasury is at 3.7% of GDP or 17.8% of total tax revenues.<sup>22</sup>
- Palestine Israeli occupation authorities approved the construction of 980 new settlement units in Efrat settlement, illegally built on Palestinian residents' lands to the south of Bethlehem.<sup>23</sup>
- Pakistan's Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry, restated his country's position regarding the Palestinian issue has not changed, affirming Pakistan's full support of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.<sup>24</sup>



*Covid-19 devastates the shattered economy, August 10, 2020, photo credit: MENA FN.*

## Syria

- The Russia and Syria plan to sign an economic pact before the end of the year that is partly aimed at circumventing U.S. sanctions, Russia's deputy prime minister said Monday 7<sup>th</sup> of Sep, as he led a high-level delegation on a visit to Damascus.<sup>25</sup>
- The Central Bank of Syria allowed local banks to resume lending facilities to their clients on September 8 after a suspension of three months.<sup>26</sup>
- The shortage of oil products is leading to a sharp increase in public transport fares across Syria, ticket prices are increasing by around 50 percent, and Syria is witnessing a supply crisis of bread.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Econostrum, Sept. 8, 2020, [https://en.econostrum.info/UNCTAD-is-alarmed-at-the-economic-repercussions-of-the-Covid-on-an-already-bled-Palestine\\_a613.html](https://en.econostrum.info/UNCTAD-is-alarmed-at-the-economic-repercussions-of-the-Covid-on-an-already-bled-Palestine_a613.html)

<sup>22</sup> Wafa, Sept. 9, 2020, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/119166>

<sup>23</sup> Wafa, Sept 13, 2020, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/120187>

<sup>24</sup> Wafa, Sept 13, 2020, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/120185>

<sup>25</sup> ABC, Sept 7, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russian-fm-syria-meets-assad-visit-2012-72859956>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.syria-report.com/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.syria-report.com/>





- Syria's government decided to reopen the Damascus International Airport for international flights while taking all precautionary measures against coronavirus.<sup>28</sup>
- The Central Bank of Syria has raised SYP 150 billion by issuing treasury bonds.<sup>29</sup>
- Official Current Exchange Rate SP/USD: 1250 SP/USD  
Current Exchange Rate in Black Market: 2350-2400 SP/USD  
The average of exchange Rate in Black Market in September 2020: 2200 SP/USD.



*Workers wearing protective gear spray disinfectant as a precaution against the coronavirus outbreak inside a public bus in Aleppo, Syria. March 15, 2020, photo credit: SANA*

## Cyprus

- The Cypriot government claimed that it will strip seven people of their "golden passports" that were bought in the country's citizenship-by-investment scheme.<sup>30</sup>
- To investigate citizenships granted between 2007 and 2020 as part of a state scheme to attract investments, a committee was appointed.<sup>31</sup>
- According to data published by the statistical service, the Cypriot economy in 2020 shrank to a greater degree when compared to 2013.<sup>32</sup>



*A new committee was formed to investigate granted citizenships, September 9, 2020, photo credit: Cyprus Mail.*

<sup>28</sup> National Herald , Sept. 17, 2020, [https://www.thenationalherald.com/coronavirus/arthro/syria\\_to\\_reopen\\_the\\_damascus\\_international\\_airport\\_for\\_international\\_flights-860715/](https://www.thenationalherald.com/coronavirus/arthro/syria_to_reopen_the_damascus_international_airport_for_international_flights-860715/)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.syria-report.com/>

<sup>30</sup> Aljazeera, Sept. 4, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/cyprus-strip-people-golden-passports-200904173612322.html>

<sup>31</sup> Cyprus Mail, September 9, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/09/09/panel-investigating-citizenships-by-investment-sworn-in/>

<sup>32</sup> Cyprus Mail, August 31, 2020, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/08/31/cyprus-economy-in-2020-hit-harder-than-in-2013/>



- The Finance Minister Constantinos Petrides after re-evaluating the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, is sticking to its basic scenario of the economy shrinking by 7%.<sup>33</sup>
- 1. 18 USD Euro official currency value<sup>34</sup>

### 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
- During this month Egypt witnessed a decrease in new reported cases per day. However, the number of deaths increased<sup>35</sup>.
  - Chairman of the Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI) Abdel Moneim Altras claimed that Egypt is looking into producing the anticipated Russian coronavirus vaccine, Sputnik V, which has been under human trials, once the necessary tests are completed.<sup>36</sup>



*Chairman of the Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI) Abdel Moneim Altras (Photo: Al-Ahram)*

<sup>33</sup> Financial Mirror, August 25, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/08/25/cyprus-says-economy-will-shrink-by-7-gdp-in-2020/>

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy\\_and\\_exchange\\_rates/euro\\_reference\\_exchange\\_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html)

<sup>35</sup> Alarby, Sept 23, 2020, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/>

<sup>36</sup> Ahram, Sept. 3, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/379277/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-looking-to-produce-Russian-coronavirus-vacci.aspx>



- A public health expert in Egypt warned of the continued spread of the novel coronavirus, adding that a new strand of the virus that attacks the digestive system has appeared in the country.<sup>37</sup>

## Jordan

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 2,034 corona confirmed cases
  - 1,508 recovered
  - 15 deaths
- During this month, the number of new recorded cases exponentially spiked to extreme levels.<sup>38</sup>
  - A researcher of coronavirus spreading statistics, Mutasim Saeedan, claimed that the country “may reach 4 and 5,000 cases of corona per day in Jordan” by the end of the month.<sup>39</sup>
  - The government decided to cancel hotel quarantine for incoming travelers and replacing it with home quarantine.<sup>40</sup>



*Epidemics Committee: Possible total lockdown in Jordan, September 23, 2020, photo credit: Roya News.*

<sup>37</sup> Middle East Monitor, September 4, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200904-egypt-official-warns-of-new-covid-19-strand-that-attacks-digestive-system/>

<sup>38</sup> Russia Today, [https://arabic.rt.com/middle\\_east/1156491-](https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1156491-)

<sup>39</sup> Roya News, September 23, 2020, <https://en.royanews.tv/news/22487/2020-09-23>

<sup>40</sup> Almadenah News, Spet 23, 2020, <https://www.almadenahnews.com/article/857199>



## Iraq

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 234,934 corona confirmed cases
  - 176,602 recovered
  - 7,042 deaths
- In a report published by the World Food Program, over 90% of small and medium enterprises in the food and agriculture sector reported being severely to moderately affected by the pandemic<sup>41</sup>.
  - According to the government health committee, Iraq will bar entry to religious pilgrims to the country, just weeks ahead of a Shia Muslim pilgrimage
  - Fears grow among employees of the decaying health sector due to the aggravated assaults on other doctors blamed for the death of patients.<sup>42</sup>



*Relatives of a patient, who died from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), beat up Tarik Sheibani, 47, an Iraqi doctor and director of Al-Amal Hospital, in this still image taken from CCTV footage obtained by Reuters, in Najaf, Iraq, August 27, 2020. Al-Amal Hospital via REUTERS.*

<sup>41</sup> OCHA, Sept. 23, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/food-security-iraq-impact-covid-19-june-august-2020-enar>

<sup>42</sup> The Arab Weekly, Sept 23, 2020, <https://the arabweekly.com/iraq-bar-foreign-pilgrims-over-fears-coronavirus>



## Lebanon

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 17,308 corona confirmed cases
- 4,811 recovered
- 167 deaths

- The head of Parliament's Health Committee MP Assem Araji claimed that Lebanon had "lost control" of coronavirus but that a lockdown was still not being considered at this time.<sup>43</sup>
- Caretaker Health Minister Hamad Hasan urged the rest of the government to convene to reissue another lockdown. However, the Minister of Interior claimed that such an act is not feasible.
- Ninety UN peacekeepers in south Lebanon tested positive for the novel coronavirus.<sup>44</sup>



*Medical workers take swab samples in Beirut, May 19, 2020, Daily Star.*

<sup>43</sup> Daily Star, Sept 23, 2020, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/Sep-23/512139-coronavirus-out-of-control-in-lebanon-lockdown-off-the-cards-for-now-mp.ashx>

<sup>44</sup> Arab News, September 13, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1733901/middle-east>





## Palestine

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 23,281 corona confirmed cases
- 15,338 recovered
- 159 deaths
- According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the unemployment rate in Palestine has increased to 26.6 per cent due to covid-19.<sup>45</sup>
- On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, Palestine reached 1000 infections per day foreshadowing a worsening situation<sup>46</sup>.



*Despite Palestinians taking preventive measures, the virus spreads, September, 2020, photo credit: Anadolu Agency.*

## Syria

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 2,765 corona confirmed cases
- 629 recovered
- 112 deaths
- COVID-19 is having a dramatic impact on health services in Syria, where limited testing is obscuring the real extent of the pandemic, the UN's



*Standing on the left, a volunteer working to raise awareness on COVID-19 at an IDP camp in northern Idlib, Syria. Displaced from Homs herself, she knows the importance of helping protect the IDPs. September 16, 2020, photo credit: OCHA.*

<sup>45</sup> September 11, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200911-report-unemployment-rises-to-26-6-in-palestine/>

<sup>46</sup> Anadolu Agency, September 10, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/health/palestine-records-highest-daily-coronavirus-infections/1969168>



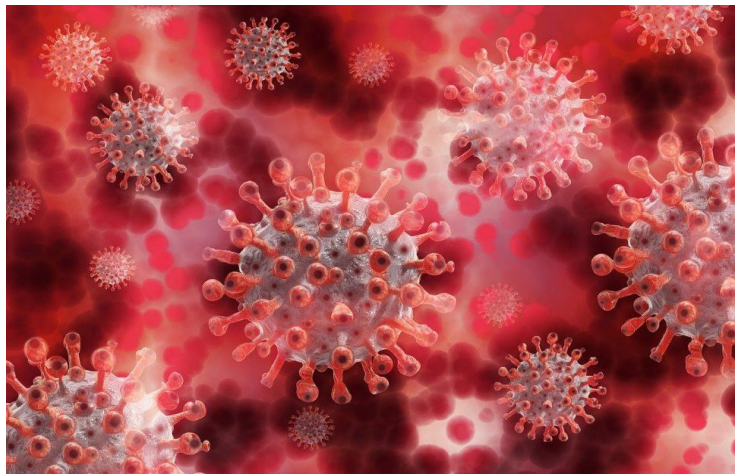
Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator said on Thursday 27 August.<sup>47</sup>

- Reports from inside Syria are pointing to a much broader spread of COVID-19 than the number of confirmed cases – currently 3966 – suggests, the UN’s top humanitarian official says.
- WHO supported a series of workshops training 155 school health doctors in Damascus, Aleppo, Tartous and Hama, focusing on school-specific guidelines and key messages.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) was further distributed by UNRWA to 111 sanitation laborers as a priority.
- UNICEF distributed 7,000 additional PPEs, and further continued operation and maintenance of WASH infrastructure (including the provision of sodium hypochlorite for water disinfection) across the country.
- UNFPA delivered 500,000 medical masks and 12,500 boxes of gloves in the reporting period, in addition to 5,000 liters of alcohol, 5,000 bottles of alcohol based hand gel, 1,000 bottles of surface sanitizers, 30 bottles of hand sanitizer, 12 bins, 375 boxes of gloves, in addition to 130,600 soap bars.<sup>48</sup>

## Cyprus

Corona cases, deaths and recovered are distributed as follows:

- 1,495 corona confirmed cases
- 1,139 recovered
- 21 deaths
- Authorities in Cyprus have decided to narrow down their COVID-19 safe-countries list, to only eight countries.<sup>49</sup>
- On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, Cyprus reported the highest number of new cases since April.<sup>50</sup>



*New cases have spiked up this month in Cyprus. September 25, 2020, photo credit: Cyprus Mail*

<sup>47</sup> UN, August 27, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1071222>

<sup>48</sup> Relief Web, Sept 17, 2020, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria\\_COVID-19\\_Humanitarian%20Update\\_No%2018\\_17Sept2020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria_COVID-19_Humanitarian%20Update_No%2018_17Sept2020_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> MOH, [https://www.moh.gov.cy/moh/moh.nsf/index\\_en/index\\_en](https://www.moh.gov.cy/moh/moh.nsf/index_en/index_en)

<sup>50</sup> Financial Mirror, Sept 22, 2020, <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/09/23/covid19-cyprus-cases-see-biggest-jump-since-april/>



## 4. THE REFUGEE SITUATION

### Egypt

- In an attempt to promote education within refugee communities, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) posted a video on their official social media accounts showing Football player Mohamad Salah, talking with four African refugee students, discussing the importance of the digital education.<sup>51</sup>
- As of the beginning of September the number of Syrian refugees in Egypt is 130,047.<sup>52</sup>

### Jordan

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

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

- 194,250 in Amman Governorate (29.5 %)
- 163,449 in Mafraq Governorate (24.8%)
- 135,725 in Irbid Governorate (20.6%)
- 96,004 in Zarqa Governorate (14.6%)
- 18,417 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
- 13,105 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
- 9,317 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
- 8,431 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
- 8,358 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
- 6,548 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)
- 3,650 in Aqaba Governorate (0.6%)
- 1,704 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)

<sup>51</sup> Ahram, Sept 23, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/6/53/383751/Sports/Talents-Abroad/Egypt-Salah-brings-African-refugee-students-voice.aspx>

<sup>52</sup><https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/1>



- According to Amnesty International, Jordanian authorities on August 10 have forcibly transferred at least 16 Syrian refugees, including eight children aged between four and 14, to an informal camp in a no man's land located in the desert between Syria and Jordan.<sup>53</sup>
- The UN refugee agency confirmed two coronavirus cases in the Azraq camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan.<sup>54</sup>
- On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September over 115,000 girls and boys went Back to Learning in the schools of UNRWA in Jordan.<sup>55</sup>

## 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%)
  - 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%)<sup>56</sup>
- The ministry of planning and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations agreed to strengthen food security in Iraq.<sup>57</sup>
  - UNESCO Iraq Office in partnership with the Erbil Citadel and local authorities initiated a project to support livelihoods through cultural heritage development, create jobs and promote the sustainable development of heritage assets in the region.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Amnesty, September 15, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/jordan-stop-forcible-transfer-of-syrian-refugees-to-a-no-mans-land-in-the-desert/>

<sup>54</sup> Aljazeera, Sept. 8, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/08/first-covid-19-cases-confirmed-in-jordan-camp-for-syrian-refugees/>

<sup>55</sup> OCHA, Sept 1, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/unrwa-school-children-jordan-go-back-learning>

<sup>56</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

<sup>57</sup> OCHA, Sept 21, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/ministry-planning-and-fao-agree-strengthen-cooperation-achievement-food-security-iraq>

<sup>58</sup> OCHA, Sept 21, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unesco-and-eu-have-launched-project-erbil-citadel-within-framework-eu-regional-trust>



- According to the IOM (International Organization for Migration), 34 families of IDPs voluntarily returned to their areas of origin after leaving Salamiyah Camp.<sup>59</sup>

## Lebanon

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

Refugees in Lebanon are distributed as follows:

- 339,473 in Bekaa (38.6%)
  - 236,736 in North Lebanon (26.9%)
  - 206,628 in Beirut (23.5%)
  - 96,761 in South Lebanon (11.0%)<sup>60</sup>
- The EU displaced 35 million USD for the sake of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>61</sup>
  - The QRCS (Qatar Red Crescent Society) dispatched medical, food support to reduce Coronavirus impact in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps in response to the increasing COVID-19 cases.
  - The United Nations World Food Program (WFP) is radically expanding its support to a key Lebanese social assistance program, with the goal of helping 270,000 people get through the triple shock caused by economic crisis, the COVID-19 lockdown and the blasts at Beirut port.<sup>62</sup>

## Syria

- Reported on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, the humanitarian community recorded in June, about 32,000 spontaneous IDP return movements in different locations across Syria, marking about a seventy percent decrease in comparison to the previous month.
- Similarly, the humanitarian community tracked about 58,600 IDP movements across Syria, which is almost the same number of displacements with the previous month.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> OCHA, Sept 11, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iom-iraq-facilitated-returns-operation-underway-ninewa-governorate>

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

<sup>61</sup> 961, September 24, 2020, <https://www.the961.com/eu-donates-35m-refugees-lebanon/>

<sup>62</sup> OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/qrcs-extends-medical-food-support-reduce-coronavirus-impact-lebanon-s-palestinian>

<sup>63</sup> OCHA, Sept 9, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/map/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-idp-spontaneous-returns-july-2020>





- The United States, announced more than \$720 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the people of Syria both inside Syria and across the region.<sup>64</sup>
- FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the generous contribution of Kuwait, has reached 3 000 rural families in Daraa and As-Suwayda governorates with seasonal vegetable seedlings.<sup>65</sup>
- The Global Food Security Cluster (FSC) released a report, warning that 4.3M people in need of food security and livelihoods support in northwest Syria.<sup>66</sup>

## Cyprus

- According to the UNHCR, between the start of July and 14 September, at least 21 boats left Lebanon for Cyprus. At least six people from the boats died, including two children, and six are missing at sea.<sup>67</sup>
- Refugees and asylum seekers at the Pournara refugee camp in Kokkinotrimithia clashed with police after they arrested a non-resident who was found there in violation of rules on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> OCHA, Sept 24, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/united-states-announces-additional-humanitarian-assistance-syrian-0>

<sup>65</sup> OCHA, Sept 21, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-fao-and-kuwait-partner-support-vulnerable>

<sup>66</sup> OCHA, Sept 23, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/43m-people-need-food-security-and-livelihoods-support-northwest-syria-23>

<sup>67</sup> The New Humanitarian, Sept 21, 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/09/21/Lebanon-Cyprus-Beirut-security-economy-migration>

<sup>68</sup> In Cyprus, Sept 2, 2020, <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/overnight-clashes-with-police-at-pournara-refugee-camp/>



## 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, convened with Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsaknayan, who is on an official visit to Egypt, to discuss issues regarding religious extremism, minorities, and peaceful coexistence in the Middle East.<sup>69</sup>
- Responding to allegations that the Coptic Church constructed churches illegally, official Coptic Orthodox Church spokesperson Paul Halim confirmed that no churches have been built on state-owned lands except in new cities in accordance with the law.<sup>70</sup>
- A number of the dioceses of St. Mark's announced that they will enter the second phase of the reopening of monasteries, in light of confronting the emerging corona virus.<sup>71</sup>



*His Holiness with the Armenian Foreign Minister, September 13, 2020, photo credit: Public Radio of Armenia.*

<sup>69</sup> HETQ, Sept 13, 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/121481>

<sup>70</sup> Egypt Independent, Sept 4, 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/egypts-orthodox-church-says-no-churches-are-illegally-built-on-state-owned-lands/>

<sup>71</sup> Misr Alan, September 14, 2020, <https://www.misr-alan.com/9431431>



## Jordan

- The Council of Church Heads in Jordan announced the suspension of prayers and masses for a week in all churches in the city of Fuheis, and for a period of 14 days in the Latin Church, after a church servant was infected with the Corona virus.<sup>72</sup>



*Churches will be closed down in anticipation of a new wave of corona in Jordan, September 14, 2020, photo credit: Misr Alan*

## Iraq

- His Beatitude Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, invited young people to enter the priestly service.<sup>73</sup>
- UNESCO started implementing the first phase of the reconstruction of Al-Tahira Church in the Iraqi city of Mosul, which consists of removing rubble and unexploded ordnance and securing the project site completely.<sup>74</sup>
- The Governor of Nineveh, Najm Al-Jubouri, announced the return of 180 displaced Christian families in Abyan after the ISIS terrorist gangs took control of their areas of origin in the Nineveh Plain.<sup>75</sup>



*His Beatitude Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, June 4, 2020, photo credit: Alwafd*

<sup>72</sup> Misr Alan, September 14, 2020, <https://www.misr-alan.com/9431431>

<sup>73</sup> Dostor, September 12, 2020, <https://www.dostor.org/3200197>

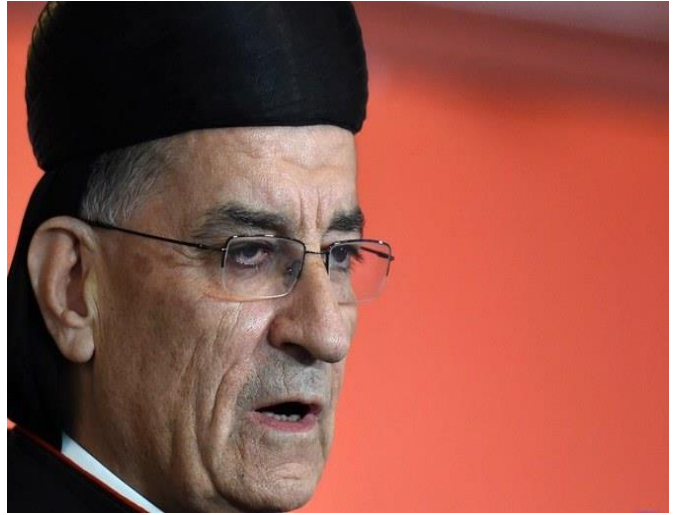
<sup>74</sup> Youm 7, September 10, 2020, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2020/9/10/>

<sup>75</sup> Iraq Akhbar, Sept. 13, 2020, <https://iraqakhbar.com/2642283>



## Lebanon

- In the context of the commendable diplomatic movement that rose to extend a helping hand to Lebanon and the Lebanese during the catastrophe, the Orthodox meeting, which was presided by Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, demanded the presence of the sect in meetings held by presidents, ministers and international officials during their visit to our wounded country.<sup>76</sup>
- HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, in his weekly mass called on the United Nations to impose an international imposition on the issue of Beirut port spending.<sup>77</sup>
- HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church during a ceremony, honored Patriarchal Values General of the Greek Melkite Catholic Community, Professor Antoine Shar.<sup>78</sup>



*HB Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, Photo, August 10, 2020, Credit: Arab News.*

<sup>76</sup> Almarkazia, Sept 1, 2020, <https://www.almarkazia.com/ar/news/show/248235>

<sup>77</sup> Sputnik News, September 13, 2020, [https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab\\_world/20200913104652785](https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_world/20200913104652785)

<sup>78</sup> NNA, Sept. 14, 2020, <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/502324/>



## Palestine

- HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, called upon the Arab nations “to wake up from their slumber before it is too late to correct their situation”.<sup>79</sup>
- The Supreme Presidential Committee for Churches Affairs in the State of Palestine condemned the Bahraini-Israeli agreement announced by US President Trump, considering it as an encouragement for Israel to continue its occupation and its violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, their land and their holy sites.<sup>80</sup>



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

## Syria

- The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, expressed his great pain and utterly condemned the sinful attack that struck the town of Kaftoun Al-Korania, in which three of the town's finest youths, Alaa Nakhleh Faris, Fadi Deeb Sarkis, and George William Sarkis, fell during their vigil for the safety of their people and their town and their region.



*The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, August 27, 2020, photo credit: Alhbawab News.*

<sup>79</sup> Alwatan Voice, Sept 14, 2020, <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2020/09/14/1367088.html>

<sup>80</sup> Alwatan Voice, Sept 13, 2020, <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2020/09/13/1366854.html>





- His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church inaugurated the Program of Masters of Religion and Theology Studies at the University of Lugano. This inauguration came within the International Conference “Christian Churches and Communities in Near East” organized virtually by the Faculty of Theology, the Institute of Religions and Theology (ReTe) and the Frederica Spitzer Foundation.<sup>81</sup>
- During this month, it was announced that a new church in Syria, a copy of Hagia Sophia, with the help of Russia will be constructed.<sup>82</sup>

## Cyprus

- Cypriot Foreign Minister convened with HH Theodoros II Patriarch of Alexandria to discuss many issues regarding the very important work performed by the Patriarchate on the African continent and the ways in which Cyprus can contribute to it.<sup>83</sup>



*Patriarch of Alexandria HH Theodoros II, September 14, 2020, photo credit: Ekklesia Online.*

<sup>81</sup> <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/>

<sup>82</sup> Greek City Times, September 8, 2020, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/09/08/a-new-hagia-sophia-in-syria-the-first-images/>

<sup>83</sup> Ekklesia Online, September 14, 2020, <https://www.ekklisiaonline.gr/nea/synantisi-patriarchi-alexandrias-me-ton-ypex-tis-kyprou/>



## 6. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

*Interview with Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, MECC Policies and Communication Advisor, on the Egyptian TV ME SAT, About the Latest updates of the Beirut Port Explosion and the Relief Role of the Council (September 8, 2020)*

Ziad El Sayegh, MECC Policies and Communication Advisor, was the guest of “Good Evening” (Masa’ El Kheir in Arabic) program broadcasted on the Egyptian TV ME SAT. During his interview over the phone, he highlighted the latest news regarding the destructive Beirut port explosion which occurred on August 4, and its enormous repercussions. He also underlined the MECC role in helping the afflicted Beirut and its distressed people, thanking His Holiness Pope Tawadros II for responding to the Council’s appeal by sending a shipment of aid offered by the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. In addition, El Sayegh mentioned the joint statement issued by the Middle East Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and ACT Alliance, in which these organizations called for a transparent international investigation into the Beirut disaster and for justice and support to the Lebanese people.



*Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, MECC Policies and Communication Advisor, September 8, 2020, Photo credit: MECC Website*



*The Journalist Huguette Salameh, Director of the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department Highlighted on Mariam TV the Council's Disaster Relief Role and the MECC Beirut Appeal (September 10, 2020)*



*The Journalist Huguette Salameh, Director of the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department, September 10, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website*

The Journalist Huguette Salameh, Director of the MECC Communication and Public Relations Department, was the guest of "Al Mawa'd" program broadcasted on Maryam TV. During her interview, she mentioned the humanitarian and disaster relief role the MECC is executing since its foundation in 1974, in addition to its mission and goals. She also highlighted the MECC Beirut Appeal issued due to the Beirut Port explosion that occurred on the 4th of August 2020, thanking His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and the Coptic Church in Egypt for sending aid to Beirut. Moreover, Salameh underlined the joint statement issued by the Middle East Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, in which these organizations called for a transparent and international investigation into the Beirut disaster.



*MECC prayed with Cardinal Pietro Parolin on the intention of the wounded Beirut (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Behealany and Fr. Gaby Hachem with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website*

Under the framework of the solidarity visit done by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican's Secretary of State, to Beirut on the 3rd of September, 2020, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), represented by its Secretary General Dr. Souraya Behealany and the Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, Fr. Gaby Hachem, participated in the reception ceremony. In addition, they participated in the meeting held by Cardinal Parolin with the spiritual leaders in Lebanon.

After visiting the Saint George Maronite Cathedral in Beirut Downtown, Cardinal Parolin prayed for Beirut, in order for this wounded capital to be revived. Dr. Souraya Behealany, Secretary General, and Fr. Gaby Hachem took part in this prayer, alongside spiritual and official delegations.

It is important to mention that Cardinal Petro Parolin's visit to Lebanon involved a field tour in Beirut Port and in the stricken areas, as well as a meeting with the victims and the injured.



## *MECC Forms New Ecumenical Committee to follow up on Beirut's appeal (September, 2020)*

At the invitation of the Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), Dr. Souraya Bechealany and with the blessings of the heads of the member churches and the metropolitans of Beirut's dioceses, the Beirut Appeal's Ecumenical Committee held its first meeting in order to organize and coordinate the humanitarian and relief work between the Council and the churches in Beirut and follow up on the disaster relief operation targeting the biggest number possible of people affected by the Beirut blast.



*New ecumenical committee formed to follow up on Beirut's appeal, September, 2020, photo credit: AFP*

This committee is composed of a team from the Middle East Council of Churches, Reverend Philbert Van Saint from Kirk in Actie in the Netherlands who is an advisor to the committee, and representatives of the member churches in Beirut; including the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate, the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate, the Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut, the Syriac Orthodox Eparchy of Beirut, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Beirut, the Syriac Catholic Eparchy of Beirut, the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Beirut and the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East.

During this meeting, Father Gaby Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department (TED), who was representing Dr. Bechealany, gave a welcome speech in which he referred to the icon of ecumenical unity that is reflected through this common humanitarian work. He emphasized the council's disaster relief appeal and the necessity to reveal the truth behind this disaster. Through the first part of the meeting, Mr. Samer Laham, Director of the Diakonia Department, explained the activities carried out by the Diakonia Department within the framework of this appeal, such as distributing in-kind donations, cleaning the rubble, restoring homes, schools, and several work centers.

On the other hand, during the second part of the event the participants presented the initiatives launched by their churches to help the injured families and provided an assessment of the damages to public and





private properties. Father Gaby Hachem also talked about the Trauma Healing and Spiritual guidance programs which will be organized by the TED in Beirut, in order to provide distressed people with spiritual and psychological support.

At the end of the meeting, the participants agreed on several decisions and the most important for the council to send a standardized questionnaire form to the churches in Beirut in order to know their needs and priorities. It was also agreed upon that the churches would be informed periodically about the aid received by the Council in order to coordinate its distribution to the beneficiary families, provided that the committee meets every fifteen days.

*The MECC Diakonia department pursues its humanitarian mission aiming to save Beirut (September, 2020)*



*MECC Diakonia team distributing food rations to the member churches, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website*



A month after the catastrophic blast that hit the Beirut port, the Diakonia Department of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) continues its disaster relief work on the field, within the framework of the appeal launched by the Council to help all those affected and injured.

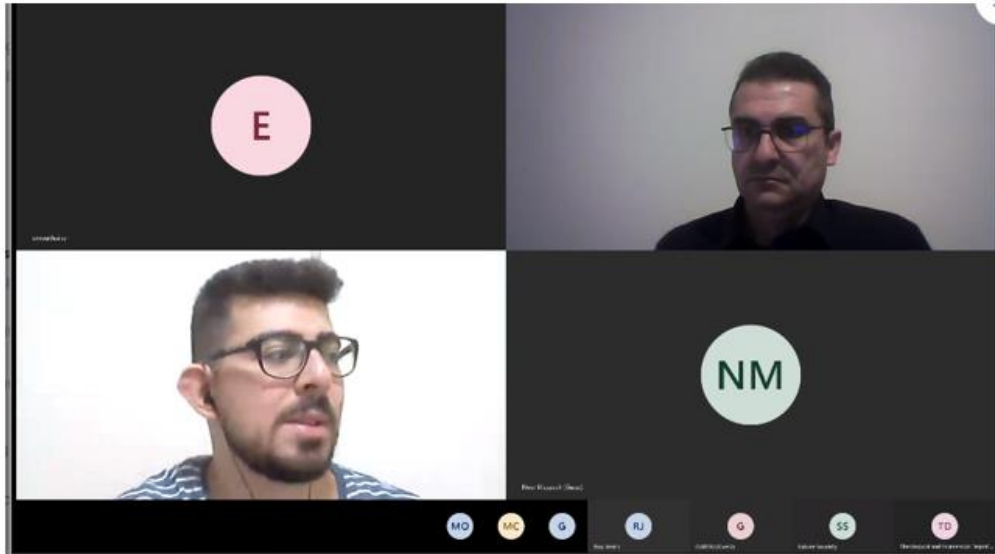
Therefore, the department launched a new partnership with Tearfund, a relief and humanitarian agency located in London, to target the most vulnerable people among those affected by the blast, with unrestricted cash assistance.

Moreover, the Diakonia department's team and a number of volunteers received a shipment of aid and in-kind supplies, sent by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, on behalf of the Coptic Church in Egypt, in response to the Council's Appeal and aiming to support the people of Beirut. The team distributed food rations to the member churches, and medicines and medical supplies to the dispensaries located in the affected areas and to the Our Lady dispensary in Sabtiyeh that belongs to MECC.

It is worth mentioning that, that in addition to humanitarian activities organized to provide disaster relief to Beirut and its people, the Diakonia Department continues to implement programs aiming at confronting the Coronavirus (Covid-19) which is spreading globally. In fact, the department has distributed packages of health supplies and cleaning/sterilization materials to beneficiaries in North and South of Lebanon.



*Following the Beirut blast, MECC supports young people spiritually and psychologically (September 2020)*



*An image of the online meeting, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC website*

As part of the follow-up to the practical recommendations expressed by the youth during the online meetings held by the Council of Middle East Churches on the 25th & 26th August 2020 and in the belief of their active role in the disaster relief of Beirut, the department of Theological Affairs and Ecumenical Relations, in partnership and cooperation with the Great Youth and the Theological Seminary Department of the Roman Catholic-Rabbwa Patriarchate, organize the program of "healing from psychological trauma and spiritual advice" on the 12th and 19th of September 2020.

This program aims to spiritually and psychologically support a group of young people who have lived through the tragedy of the 4th of August blast. Some of them participated in the disaster relief operation through organizations, church movements and civil associations and movements; they were in direct contact with the victims and the injured, including those who were traumatized by the disaster and who went through deep pain and sadness.

The meeting is a part of the Middle East Council's initiatives with the youth, following a lengthy meeting in Al-Rabwa theological seminary to discuss and set priorities to help these young men and women.



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, highlighted on the Italian Swiss radio channel RSI the MECC role in the disaster relief of Beirut (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany, photo credit: MECC website*

The Italian Swiss radio channel RSI hosted Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, to discuss the Beirut Port blast that took place on the 4th of August, 2020, and its repercussions. She also mentioned the MECC Beirut appeal and its theological statement, for the relief of the afflicted Beirut and its affected people. In addition, Dr. Bechealany underlined the humanitarian and service role the MECC is executing ever since its foundation.

Link to the interview: <https://bit.ly/32sNTDh>



*Hope prevails in times of crisis in Lebanon: interview with Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, by the World Council of Churches (September 14, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany, photo credit: MECC website*

*By Claus Grue, Communication Consultant for the World Council of Churches*

**The fatal blast in Beirut last month became yet another blow to an already plagued country. In recent months, a financial crisis with a free-falling currency and rising unemployment has further undermined the Lebanese economy. Add to that one million Syrian refugees and the COVID-19 pandemic, and the contours of a fragile nation facing monumental challenges emerge.**

Things started to get worse in October last year, when nationwide civil protests against the Lebanese government ignited a financial and socio-political crisis which has gained new momentum after the Beirut blast.

“The reality in Lebanon is catastrophic. People have lost their savings and their jobs, and many also their homes and loved ones in the blast,” says Dr Souraya Bechealany, secretary general of the Middle East





Council of Churches and professor and researcher at the Faculty of Religious Studies at the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut.

She points at four main challenges which must be overcome in order to steer Lebanon back on track towards peace and prosperity:

The first is religious fundamentalism, which has poisoned politics and divided the country.

Secondly, a demographic shift fuelled by a massive influx of Syrian refugees.

The third main challenge is the economic crisis with a dramatic devaluation of Lebanese lira and skyrocketing unemployment numbers.

Fourthly, the political crisis and dysfunctional leadership of the country.

“There is a widespread feeling among my fellow citizens that enough is enough. People are clearly fed up with the inability of our government to provide even basic necessities, such as electricity and sanitation. We have the right to know the truth and we must stand tall against corruption. It is all about justice,” she continues.

One initiative addressing that particular issue is “Kairos Middle East Towards Churches Global Compact,” a series of seminars launched in December last year, where experts in theology and geopolitics from Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Cyprus and Jordan are brought together.

“This is a promising project, it aims at bringing all churches together behind a proposal to build a better future,” Bechealany explains.

### **The Kingdom of Jesus is still here**

In the midst of all the suffering and misery, Bechealany is hopeful about a brighter future for Lebanon.

“We are strong because as Christians we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We received the baptism, the Holy Spirit and God through Jesus Christ himself. The Kingdom of Jesus Christ is still here and beyond today’s harsh realities, there is hope. When you see the people of Beirut cleaning up directly after the blast, it is a sign of hope and resilience,” she says.

Representing churches with thorough experience in handling crises makes her confident that solidarity measures taken by the Middle East Council of Churches and its partners directly after the Beirut blast will make at least a little difference. In addition to humanitarian services, such as food, medicine and shelter, they include initiatives to help businesses recover, trauma healing and spiritual counselling and distribution of international aid from partners and churches around the globe.

“We must continue to believe in peace and change and stand firmly by the people of Lebanon,” Bechealany says.



### Cooperation and communication are crucial

Immediately after the blast, she led ecumenical visits to affected churches to express solidarity. A special initiative emanating from those visits is the creation of an ecumenical committee with representatives from each church.

“Cooperation and communication are crucial in times of crisis. Only our fear challenges what we can do. We must work together across religions and share our lives with Jews, Muslims and others,” she explains. After a rather short tenure as Middle East Council of Churches secretary general—a little less than three years—she will resign by the end of this month to continue her work as a researcher and theology teacher at the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut. Her successor will be appointed at an extra Middle East Council of Churches Executive Committee meeting held in Bkerke, Lebanon on 18 September. Originally, the Middle East Council of Churches 12th General Assembly was planned to take place in mid-September this year, but that has been postponed until further, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It has been a privilege to serve as secretary general, but now it is time for me to return to my call as a teacher,” she concludes.

### *MECC Policies and Communication Advisor on Télé Lumière (September 15, 2020)*



*Interview with Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, MECC Policies and Communication Advisor, on Télé Lumière and Noursat, about the MECC disaster relief role in facing the Beirut blast, September 15, 2020, photo credit: Noursat.*



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, Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, MECC Policies and Communication Advisor, was the guest of the journalist Lea Maamari on the show. During his interview, he underlined the MECC's role amid the challenges resulting from the Beirut Port blast. He also mentioned the joint statement issued by the Middle East Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, in which these organizations called for a transparent and international investigation. In addition, he featured the MECC appeal for the relief of Beirut and its Theological statement towards this disaster. Moreover, El Sayegh highlighted the MECC's mission in preserving the dignity of everyone and its humanitarian and relief role in all the Middle Eastern countries.

*The speech of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, in the beginning of the MECC's Executive Committee meeting (September 18, 2020)*



*Memorial picture taken showing participants of the executive committee, September 18, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.*

The second opening speech of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, who's hosting the Executive Committee's members of the Churches in Egypt at the Papal



Headquarters in the Saint Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral. So they can all participate online in the meeting held in Bkerki.

Link to the speech: <https://bit.ly/36AHMPt>

*The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches from Bkerki: Solidarity with the Lebanese and election of Dr. Michel Abs as Secretary General (September 18, 2020)*



*Memorial picture taken showing participants of the executive committee, September 18, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.*

### **Executive Committee Meeting**

**September 18, 2020**

**Hosted by the Maronite Church- Bkerki**

**and the Coptic Orthodox Church-Cairo**



## Final Statement

The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches held an exceptional meeting, as the Council's Twelfth General Assembly was scheduled to take place at this time. However, the exceptional circumstances imposed by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inability of direct meeting between members from different countries and churches, and replacing it with virtual electronic means for the member churches in Egypt, Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Cyprus, produced a legal agreement on this exceptional meeting, which was hosted in Lebanon by His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi - Patriarch of Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch at the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerke with the participation of His Beatitude Youhanna X - Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and president of the Council for the Greek Orthodox Family, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II - Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church who is the president of the Council for the Eastern Orthodox Family, and Right Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union Lebanon and president of the Council for the Evangelical Family. His Beatitude Mar Louis Raphael Sako – Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans and president of the Council for the Catholic family, participated electronically from Iraq. And in a generous initiative, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II - Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church hosted members of the Committee from the various churches in Egypt at the Papal Headquarters in the Coptic Orthodox Church of in Cairo.

After the opening prayer, a speech was made by His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Beshara Boutros Al-Rahi in which he said: *“The ship threatened of getting filled and sinking by strong winds and waves, symbolizes the witnessing Church in the sea of our Middle East countries troubled by the winds of conflicts and wars, political, economic, financial and living crises, and the Corona pandemic, and which reached a climax in Lebanon with the Beirut port explosion on August 4, which left many casualties and destruction.*

*The Christian presence in this East became diminished, and its message limited, and fear dwelt in the hearts of Christians, until they chanted the cry of Jesus' disciples full of fear and hope: “Teacher, don't you care if we drown?” (Mark4: 38). So our Lord silenced the winds with a word, and a complete tranquility occurred. He called the disciples to be strong in fear, and to stand firm in the faith. This invitation is addressed to us today, and to our Churches. Let us not forget the word of our Lord Jesus: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John16: 33)”*

He emphasized that *“the Middle East Council of Churches is invited, in the current circumstances, to work with the churches and their presidents, to confront the waves and winds that ravage their homelands, institutions, people, entities, and cause, with stances of faith and hope”.*

Then a recorded word of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, in which he welcomed the participants, and continued: *“I would like to join Lebanon in the tragedy it suffered early August, and we pray for this beloved country and for all its citizens in the north and in the south for the spirit of love to prevail especially as Lebanon celebrates its centenary of its founding as a distinguished and open country among the Arab*





people. I pray that all of its crises shall end, that that it returns to participation, and to his vital presence in the Middle East”.

His Beatitude ended: “Thanks goes to Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany, for her tremendous efforts since January 2018 until now. I pray for the Middle East Council of Churches, to remain strong, effective and influential, and a place for joint action among our Churches in the countries of the Middle East, and that the new Secretary General will preserve these goals for which this council was formed, and raise the prayer for peace in the world and in many points of conflict in the Middle East. ”

After that, the work of the first session was launched under the presidency of His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, followed by the legal call for presence to the participating members personally and through electronic means, the appointment of the meeting minutes’ taker and the designation of the drafting committee of the final statement, approval of the agenda, and approval of the minutes of the previous Executive Committee meeting that was held in Cyprus on January 21-22, 2020. Afterwards, the Secretary General of the Council, Dr. Souraya Bechealany, presented her comprehensive report on what the council did over two years of her mandate (2018-2020), and finally the financial report.

In a second closed session attended by the original members and headed by Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, the decisions and recommendations were recited, the General Secretary Dr. Michel Abs and the Associate General Secretary Father Gabriel Hachem for the Catholic family were appointed. In the closing session headed by His Beatitude Patriarch Youhanna X, the meeting minutes and the closing statement were approved. Then there was a closing prayer, and the memorial photo.

The participants emphasized the following:

- Deep solidarity with the Lebanese in the catastrophic tragedy they are suffering as a result of Port of Beirut explosion, and the continuation of ecumenical ecclesiastical efforts with all local, regional and international partners to lift the material and psychological repercussions of this tragedy as a sign of values and capabilities of human fraternity.
- Deep Solidarity with all those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and lost loved ones, with the continuous prayer raised for its decline, as well as appreciating the efforts of all medical and social teams devoted to confronting the repercussions of this pandemic.
- The sustained call to end the destructive wars and conflicts in the Middle East, to protect human dignity, and to build peace on the basis of justice and right.
- Ecumenical ecclesiastical commitment to consolidate the continuity of the work of the Middle East Council of Churches, which is an expression of the unity of Christians and a sign of hope for joint cooperation for the service of mankind and for coexistence in this blessed region.
- Supporting the General Secretary steps in activating the course of action of the Middle East Council of Churches in a way that strengthens its theological, ecumenical and institutional options, and



confirms his commitment to a love platform of coordination between the member Churches for the good of the faithful and all the beloved sons of the Middle East, and to achieve peace and social justice.

The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches, realizing the magnitude of the challenges and responsibilities entrusted to the Council, raises the prayer to the Lord, asking for his blessing, and renewing before him its commitment to the continuation of the journey of achieving unity in love and partnership in responsibility.

## **Middle East Council of Churches**

### **The Executive Committee**

**Bkerke, 18/9/2020**

*The new Secretary General for the MECC*

*Dr. Michel Abs from the Orthodox Family, Faithfull to the Ecumenical mission  
(September, 2020)*



*Dr. Michel Abs, the new MECC Secretary General, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.*



The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches MECC elected on 18 September 2020 a new Secretary General Dr. Michel Abs for four years succeeding Dr. Souraya Bechealany.

Professor Abs is an economist and a sociologist. He holds a B.A., M.A. and higher diplomas in both fields and a PhD in Sociology with a focus on economic behavior.

He started lecturing at university level very early and has already a 42-years' experience in this field accompanied by approximately as many years of experience in business, education and development management and consultancy. In addition to lecturing and advising for doctoral theses at Saint Joseph University of Beirut where he is a member of the Research Ethics Committee.

His research interests cover the areas of Christian presence in the Middle East as well as socioeconomic and sociocultural developments in which he wrote and supervised a series of articles and research papers.

He is also a social activist dealing with Interreligious-Interethnic Dialogue, Social Justice and Sociocultural Development, promoting the culture of dialogue, openness and justice. He is a member and participant in the establishment of several social action groups including syndicates and NGOs.

The new Secretary General has accompanied the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in several historic stations, and he was a member of the Council's Strategic Committee and the Treasurer.

The Executive Committee members wish him success in his Ecumenical service in view of all the challenges and responsibilities that await him.



*MECC supports Lebanese youth spiritually and psychologically (September 12-19, 2020)*



*TED and several youth during the “Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counselling session”, September 19, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.*

The Theological and Ecumenical Department of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), organized a Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counseling program in partnership and cooperation with the Youth office and the Patriarchal Seminary of the Greek Melkite Catholic Church - Rabwa. This program targeted a group of young people from different member churches, scout and religious movements. It was launched based on the recommendations made by the youth during two online meetings held by this TED department following the Beirut port explosion, in order to hear their aspirations and suggestions. The program aims at supporting the participants psychologically and spiritually, so that they can in turn, help others the same way.

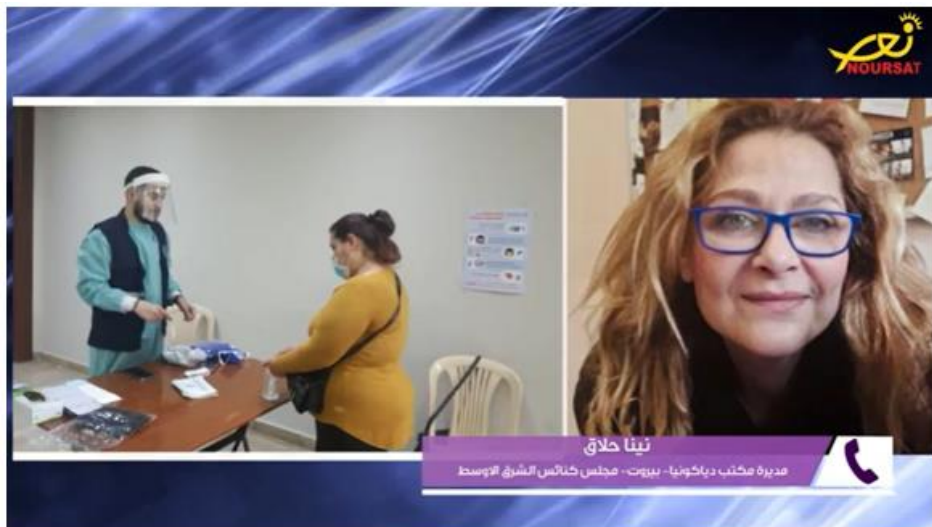
The Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counseling program consisted of two training sessions, held on 12 and 19 September 2020, each of which covered several spiritual and psychological topics. Participants were accompanied by specialists from various fields. They attended several sessions focusing on the different types of trauma and their components and how to deal with each one of them. The sessions also included techniques of listening and positive communication, tools to relieve anger and help children and adolescents cope with trauma, as well as practical exercises. In addition, spiritual and psychological sessions were held,



during which the youth were able to share the experiences they have lived, whether on a personal level or with others.

It should be noted that the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) works to implement special programs for the youth, as it believes in their leadership role on the ground, in their churches and society.

*Interview with Nina Hallak, MECC Beirut Diakonia Department's coordinator on Télé Lumière and Noursat about the MECC relief role following the Beirut Blast (September, 2020)*



*Interview with Nina Hallak, MECC Beirut Diakonia Department's coordinator on Télé Lumière and Noursat, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

Tele 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, Nina Hallak, MECC Beirut Diakonia Department's coordinator, was the guest of the program. During her phone interview, she mentioned the council's humanitarian and relief role, and mentioned the





programs that the department organizes. In addition, she underlined the MECC Beirut Appeal issued due to the Beirut Port explosion, and its activities for the relief of the devastated capital and its affected people.

### Interview with Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, on "Nidaa' Al Watan" (September 18, 2020)



## إجتماع الكنائس المسيحية اليوم في بركي قرارات جريئة وصوت "الروح القدس" يتردّد: أصدعوا



بعقد مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط اليوم إجتماعاً للجنة التنفيذية في بركي، لتتلقى فيه حضوراً واسعاً من "أولادنا" الكنائس الأعضاء في جول الشرق الأوسط، من مصر والعراق والأردن والأراضي المقدسة وقبرص ودول الخليج... وفيه سطرحت بجرأة كل قضايا الشرق الأوسط وتحدياتها أماماً مرماً ببيروت... وسبقاً خلاله إلى تعيين أمين عام جديد بالكاتولة خلافاً للأمنية العامة تريا بيشلاني.

إجتماع اللجنة التنفيذية للكنائس الشرق الأوسط  
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أجتماع اللجنة التنفيذية للكنائس الشرق الأوسط  
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أجتماع اللجنة التنفيذية للكنائس الشرق الأوسط  
أصدعوا  
1- القديسة  
2- القديسة  
3- القديسة

بعض من أعضاء اللجنة التنفيذية للكنائس الشرق الأوسط  
أصدعوا  
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أجتماع اللجنة التنفيذية للكنائس الشرق الأوسط  
أصدعوا  
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3- القديسة

Interview with Dr. Souraya Bechealany on Nidaa' Al Watan, September 18, 2020, photo credit: Nida'a Al Watan.





The journalist Nawal Nasr in the highly influential political magazine “Nidaa’ Al Watan” in Beirut- Lebanon interviewed Dr. Souraya Bechealany, MECC Secretary General, about the Middle East council of Churches (MECC) as it happened to be the meeting of the Executive Committee in Bkerki to elect the new Secretary General on the 18th of September in bkerki, Lebanon.

Dr. Souraya Bechealany, the first woman to head such a position spoke with confidence and hope. She was Secretary General for the last two years.

The council was first founded in 1974, it consisted back then all churches, except for the catholic church that joined later on. Today it consists of all the churches in the Middle East.

Dr. Bechealany repeated “We are fed up” so it is up to us to take initiative and strategic positions with our Muslim partners to devote our strategic positions. The most important subjects we will be tackling:

- Taking decisions that are also the Council’s message and while emphasizing on the common mission.
- Every four years’ the Executive committee meeting elects a new family church; this year the orthodox Family will be handed the General Secretariat.

What are the strategic decisions? We are preparing for the Kairos Middle East towards churches global compact (Process). And we will be courageous enough to read the geopolitical Ecumenical situations with the whisper of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Souraya Bechealany also added that each Christian has his own mission that is blessed by God, whether it’s here or abroad. But those who did not immigrate are the pillars and these are the people that reflect the Christian presence in the Middle East.

She then said that, it is true that the government is entrusted on its people but the church has to take care of her children. The church has to be a mother and a sister. and most importantly is that the council’s role is to put aside all the historical disagreements and to look forward because our Lord is one and he is Jesus Christ. Christians believe in diversity and so far the Ecumenical progress we have made is remarkable;



nonetheless the journey is still long and it is not an easy path. She added, The Council has been working for four years on unity and its issues are technical.

Three issues that the Christians are facing in the east are tackled: Schools, Medical attention and housing.

If these necessities were provided, people will think twice before migrating. It is up to us to find solutions for such problems and I am sure we will find the answers if we rely in all we do on the Holy Spirit.

**Link to the full interview:** <https://bit.ly/3c7BcRt>

*Video: From the Middle East Council of Churches to Dr. Souraya Bechealany, Honorary Secretary General: Thank you (September 30, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany, Honorary Secretary General, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

The family of the the Middle East Council of Churches is bidding farewell to Dr. Souraya Bechealany after 3 years in her position of Secretary General; wishing her luck in her new path.

Link to the video: <https://bit.ly/36A2cbu>



*Message of the new MECC Secretary General, Dr. Michel Abs, addressed to the council's Presidents and its Executive Committee (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Michel Abs, the MECC new Secretary General, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

**Beirut, October 1st 2020**

**Your Holiness, Your Beatitudes, Your Eminencies, Your Graces,  
Most Reverend Pastors and Fathers,**

**Dear Sisters and Brothers who shared with us the Ecumenical Day that took place in Bkerke on September 18th, 2020,**

**Dear Colleagues at the Middle East Council of Churches,**



As His Beatitude Patriarch John X Yazigi of Antioch and all the East honored me with his appreciation and overwhelmed me with his love by commissioning me and nominating me to the office of the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches,

And as You yourselves have graciously accepted this nomination,

Allow me to express to You my deepest gratitude as you have entrusted to my care this most precious talent.

Let me furthermore share with you the firm belief that I have concerning a talent for which I shall be accountable as it is put in my trust in the present historical moment we are all passing through and as we are engulfed in dangers that know no precedent.

This institution that you have entrusted me with, is part and parcel of my heart as I am also part of it. In it I have had the opportunity of sharpening a most important aspect of the values I carry in my personal entity, namely the altruistic ability to love and care for others to the utmost. These values stem from what I had been trained in at home, in school as well as at university.

As of my early childhood years, I have carried within myself the admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount which were grafted in me in the Orthodox School of the Annunciation in Beirut where our guidebook in school in the curricular religious education program was the most valuable handbook of “The Orthodox Catechesis”.

School is a most efficient tutor in fostering faith as well as in instilling a value system in us. Good fruits grow with care whereas thorns grow out of neglect. University training crowns what has been planted in us at home as well as in school. And so it was that, as I joined the Saint Joseph University in Beirut, I was helped to witness in its midst the incarnation of Christian charity as well as the valuable ethics of scientific research that contributes into forming a most important preparation to professional life. At the Saint Joseph University, I partook of the source of knowledge and values.

As for the Middle East Council of Churches, it is dear to my heart for what it stands for as well as for what it has given me, and this as much so as during my decade of work in it as a staff member as well as during many more years that followed as I kept up all the ties friendships and commitments I had acquired in it. The MECC, as I always refer to it, bears in itself the best exemplar of Christian Togetherness and dedicated action. Through it, member churches can accomplish together what none can accomplish isolated from its other sister communities. As a matter of fact, its continuity and support constitute a faith priority that cannot be disputed.





However, the Council is an institution, and as such it displays similar discrepancies as those that can be identified in any other institution. Moreover, it faces challenges that any other institution faces. This is the reason why its structure as well as the priorities it sets for itself at any given point in time require constant evaluation and upgrading in order to keep pace with the developments and changes that take place in its environmental setting and this in order for it to be able to carry out the important tasks entrusted to it, namely, on the one hand ecumenical work at the service of Christian Presence and Witness, as well as the dissemination of an ecumenical culture through the various projects it initiates and follows up on. Needless to say, that successful implementation of such tasks lies deeply incumbent on the skills of leadership, innovation and excellency present in its staff backed up of course with the necessary availability of funds.

We live in the era of Knowledge in which priority is placed on knowledge and information as an important resource. Institutions and set ups are managed in this day and age by knowledge. For this very reason, the Council will have to further become a community managed by knowledge and this as much in its own organizational set up as in its various dealings with church institutions. Such a strategy will have to rely heavily on modern communication techniques that facilitate the achievement of the goals it sets for itself.

We live in the era of Governance, so it is imperative that the Council's institutional set up operates according to the logic of sound governance. In other words, all stakeholders in any undertaking the Council sets for itself to delve into will have to speak up and be heard. This means that the logic of decision-making will be steered through sound governance and participation of all and this at all levels of common deliberations and action.

Moreover, we live in the era of Quality Management in which institutions throughout the world are racing to uphold quality in output, a policy which has proven to be effective in improving the structures of institutions as well, developing their work policies and thereby raising their levels of productivity.

We are also in the era of the Strategic Human Resources Management, so it is imperative for us to follow the path that has already started in this direction at the MECC, namely in establishing the rules for the scientific management of the human resources in order to raise their productivity and secure better fairness in dealing with personnel. In this context, it is imperative for our churches to provide us with skilled persons with adequate competencies, either for employment when positions become vacant, for appointing members to departmental or projects committees, or for forming Think Tanks for emerging issues that the Council finds itself faced with.

However, we are in a period of major transformations as the era is witnessing tremendous events that will undoubtedly change the face of humanity. Plenty are the dangers of our times and, as the popular saying



goes, "Challenges are plentiful and weigh heavily on the shoulder of the porter". Will we bear up to such challenges? History is ruthless, and it does not record wishes and intentions, but facts and actions. History is often written by the victors. Will we be among them?

As for the major challenge that we face, it lies in the maintenance of the Christian presence in our region, no matter how we define it. All that is mentioned above in this letter of mine has this goal as an aim. This is the challenge that cannot bear any controversial interpretation.

However, this goal can only be achieved through the cooperation of the various entities that constitute the Church of Christ. In the Council we are the home and bastion of Christian cooperation, we are the embodiment of Interchurch joint action. There are many fields that lay barren and uncultivated between the churches, and we are called to transform them into fertile fields where common experiences and growth prevail, so that they turn into spaces of love and knowledge.

Preserving our people on their land, where they have been living for more than two millennia, needs tremendous efforts. This is a task that is out of the ordinary, requiring the adoption of new methods at the level of challenges, and we are called to meet its beckoning.

Spiritual renewal and Christian nurture are essential tools for steadfastness and survival. But life also has material dimensions that cannot be ignored and must be dealt with, such as vocational rehabilitation, housing, health care, and education.

I do not hereby claim that the Church should replace the Government and fill its shortcomings in our region, but I only bear witness that the Church is called to provide a safety net in areas - both geographical underserved areas as well as functional service areas- in which the state is absent and in which society has disintegrated .What has happened in Lebanon is but an example among many at that.

Human groups face times of difficulties and tribulations, difficulties from which they can only be saved by faith supported by service, for human life is both spirit and matter as well.

Despite the difficulties we face today, and despite the crises that beset us, being one is the solution. Either we are a compact entity so that no one can break us, or we are fragments that can be broken stick by stick. This is true not only for the Christian community. It applies also to the homeland as well.

Studies in History and Sociology have both proven that the values with which our faith is impregnated lie behind the renaissance of humanity as well as behind its scientific progress. Is it not a fact that the values it bears were behind the establishment of schools and universities? Did they not bring about the development of scientific research, of social service as well as of all aspects of civilization?



I, for one, have the firm certainty that this vine that the Lord has planted two millennia ago will continue to spread to include ever growing areas of the planet.

The gates of Hell will not prevail against it.

**Pr. Dr. Michel Abs**

**Secretary General**

**Middle East Council of Churches**

*From Dr. Souraya Bechealany to Dr. Michel Abs*

*The Ecumenical Mission in progress (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany and Dr. Michel Abs with the strategic support group, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*



The transfer of the Ecumenical mission took place in the General Secretariat of the Middle East Council of Churches from Dr. Souraya Bechealany to Dr. Michel Abs who was elected by the Executive Committee of the MECC as the new Secretary General for a period of four years, during its last meeting on 18 September 2020 at Bkerki. The committee also called Bechealany an Honorary Secretary General due to her achievements, sacrifices and exceptional dynamism during her assumption of responsibility for the past three years.

After a transitional week to handover the administrative Council files, the departments' reports and the strategic plans for the future, a final handshake took place in the Secretary General's office. After which the two Secretary General moved to Bkerki, where the ceremony of the handover was held in the presence of the members of the strategic support group, namely, the Right Reverend Dr. Habib Badr, His Eminence Archbishop Paul Sayyah and Dr. Jean Salmanian. This was in honor of Dr. Michel Abs, also member of the Strategic Support Group and the Treasurer for three years.

The new Secretary General is one of the pillars of the Council, he supported its Ecumenical mission for decades; carrying within him talents, and he aims to invest in the Ecumenical Service, the service of the Christian presence as well as promoting the Ecumenical culture. According to the first letter he dedicated to the Council members and the Secretariat team: "This council is very dear to me because of what it holds in its core, and what I have in it; starting with A decade of intense work, follow-ups, friendships and commitments. It is by far, as I always say, the best place for Christian togetherness or common work It is the place where churches can achieve while united what they cannot achieve apart. Therefore, its continuity, support and back up constitute an indisputable priority of faith".

Best of luck to the new Secretary General, and with the Master we repeat "You were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities" Mt 25:23



*A special interview with Dr. Michel Abs, the new MECC Secretary General, on Télé Lumière and Noursat (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Michel Abs, Secretary General, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

Dr. Michel Abs, the new Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches, was the guest in a special episode on Télé Lumière and Noursat, during which he discussed periods of the Council's history through which he was present. In addition, he highlighted the challenges that the Council is facing today and revealed its plan for the future.

Link to the interview: <https://bit.ly/3d5bltQ>





*Video: Following the Beirut Blast, MECC supports Lebanese youth spiritually and psychologically (September 12-19, 2020)*



*TED and several youth during the Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counselling session, September 19, 2020, photo credit: MECC website.*

The Theological and Ecumenical Department of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), organized a Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counseling program in partnership and cooperation with the Youth office and the Patriarchal Seminary of the Greek Melkite Catholic Church - Rabwa. This program targeted a group of young people from different member churches, scout and religious movements. It aims at supporting the participants psychologically and spiritually, so that they can in turn, help others the same way.

Link to the video: <https://bit.ly/3d5bH3E>



*MECC and Tearfund launched a cash assistance project to help the affected people by the Beirut blast (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany and Dr. Michel Abs with the MECC and Tearfund teams, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

A meeting was held today at the headquarters of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in the presence of the MECC team with the Honorary Secretary General, Dr. Souraya Bechealany and the Tearfund committee director of Lebanon, Jordan and Yemen Karen Soerensen along with the regional director of the Middle East, Martin Leacm. The meeting took place to finalize the details and to set a starting date for an Emergency Humanitarian project between both partners.

The Tearfund association has been working with MECC since 2018. After the port explosion on August 4th, MECC has responded by providing 'in-kind' food and non-food assistance as well as medical supplies to vulnerable households affected by the blast and to all the injured. Consequently, Tearfund will be working with MECC to transition from the initial 'in-kind' support to cash assistance, in response to feedback from needs assessments, which indicated an overwhelming beneficiary preference for cash to support transition towards recovery; and towards reconstruction and restoration. The proposed project impact area will be Bourj Hammoud considering that approximately 40% of the houses received mild to moderate damage from the blast. However; and as opposed to some other affected areas in Beirut, households in Bourj Hammoud have been relatively underserved in the response and were already vulnerable prior to the explosion, taking



into account the poverty and financial difficulties the area has already been undergoing. Tearfund and MECC will therefore provide unconditional cash distributions to the most vulnerable households in the area where food and shelter were identified as their top priorities.

*The family of the MECC General Secretariat is bidding farewell to Dr. Souraya Bechealany (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany and Dr. Michel Abs with the MECC Team, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

The family of the General Secretariat of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) gathered in Beirut for an amicable lunch, in recognition of the Honorary General Secretary, Dr. Souraya Bechealany, who left her position as Secretary General of the Council and handed it over to the new Secretary General, Dr. Michel Abs.

On the occasion, Dr. Abs offered her an icon of the Blessed Virgin as a token of gratitude and loyalty for all her sacrifices and efforts in order to uphold the status of the Council and its ecumenical mission. The team also offered her a special gift to express their love and their gratitude.



*The DSPR Department wished the Honorary Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany luck in her new path (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Souraya Bechealany with Mrs. Sylvia Haddad, representing the DSPR Department, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

The DSPR Department represented by Mrs. Sylvia Haddad wished the Honorary Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany luck in her future endeavors and her future mission. They presented her with a gift; a handmade scarf from “Enaach” a workshop in the Palestinian Camp in Lebanon, with a small letter of appreciation that read the following:

“Dear Dr. Souraya Best wishes from all the DSPR with its chairman, board members, central office, the executive directors of the five areas. It was great knowing you. We hope you will continue to enjoy success, good health in your education profession”.



*Congratulations letters to Dr. Michel Abs, the new MECC Secretary General  
(September, 2020)*



*Dr. Michel Abs, MECC Secretary General, September, 2020,  
photo credit: MECC Website.*

Dr. Michel Abs received congratulations letters from international organizations, MECC member churches and friends, after being elected as MECC Secretary General for the next four years, wishing him a successful and blessed journey amid the difficult circumstances the Middle East and its churches are going through.

Link to the letters: <https://bit.ly/3iBs3C7>





*WCC congratulates Dr Michel Abs, new secretary general for Middle East Council of Churches (September, 2020)*



*Dr. Michel Abs, MECC Secretary General, September, 2020, photo credit: MECC Website.*

In a 21 September letter, World Council of Churches interim general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca congratulated Dr Michel Abs on being elected as the next secretary general of the Middle East Council of Churches.

“When wars and conflicts, hunger and thirst, pain and loss, break our bodies and tremble our spirits, then only God’s hope, love and comfort drive us onward, steadfast, following the steps of Jesus and his disciples on the roads of Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus, Nineveh, Sidon and Tyre,” wrote Sauca. “This is the case of the people and the churches of the Middle East today”.

Saucu assured Abs that he is not alone. “We are here to accompany you, stand with you, pray with you, work with you, walk with you, and be inspired from you, on the journey of justice and peace,” wrote Sauca. “Together we shall continue to serve our Lord in creative solidarity amidst our common fragility, as we have developed in this year’s theme of the World Week of Peace for Palestine and Israel.”



The Middle East Council of Churches has an important role to play, continued Sauca. “Promoting consensus among the churches, in times where division is the norm, is not an easy task,” he wrote. “Unity is our strength.”

## 7. MECC Humanitarian activities September 2020

### Lebanon

- Distributed 200 Food and Hygiene kits to the most in need of the affected population by the blast and in cooperation with MECC member churches.
- Distributed 150 vouchers of food items in three villages in Akkar: Chadra, Bazbina and Hmayra to support needy families.
- 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.
- Delivered 4 sessions of mental health awareness on stress management and coping mechanism for 24 women.
- Completed 16 sessions in Psychosocial support for 24 women. 10 of those women sat for an additional 2 sessions in 2 groups for more detailed and focused interventions. Also, 6 of the 24 women attended 4 sessions on parenting skills provided by MECC local partners HIMAYA and experts in the field.
- Completed 18 sessions in Psychosocial support for 24 children.
- Provided 12 children with 2 recreational sessions in the form of day camps.
- Completed 23 comprehensive sessions in life skills and health awareness for 215 Lebanese and Syrian women.
- Completed 18 sessions in soft skills for 24 women refugees.
- Completed 60 hours for 20 women in Home Care for the elderly and first aid.



Health Awareness Session (L) and First Aid Session (R), September 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Soap making session (L) and home care training (R), September 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



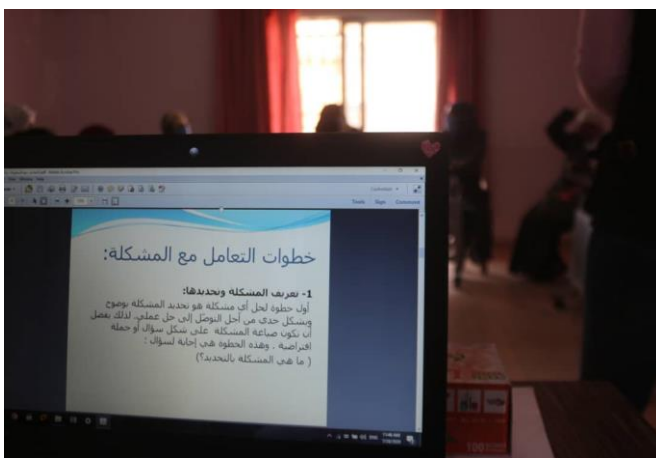
## Syria

- Completed the provision of veterinary services to hundreds of cattle owner in Daraa governorate.
- Completed the protection activities in Daraa governorate to target 500 HH with health and PSS consultations.
- Completed the distribution of summer seeds as micro gardening kits for 165 families in Daraa.
- Distributed startup kits for 22 youth in Damascus rural graduated from vocational training.
- Completed the rehabilitation of five schools in Homs and Damascus rural.
- Completed Child Protection training for 45 teachers from Damascus rural.
- Continued health project to provide medication for cancer patients.
- Continued waste management activities in Izraa and Sheikh Maskin by hiring 110 workers under cash for work project.
- Launched health awareness activity combined with distribution of hygiene kits to 1000 HH in Mesmiyeh in Daraa.
- Launched remedial classes courses for 175 students in Aleppo, 382 in Damascus rural.
- Completed the procurement to purchase 3225 school and hygiene kits to be distributed in Damascus rural, Homs and Aleppo.
- Launched education project to provide tuition fees support for 270 students in several governorates.
- Prepared to launch vocational training for 120 youth in Daraa governorates.
- Launched business startup course for 180 skilled workers in Daraa governorates.
- Complete LMA and MSNA in Ghabaghen and As-Sanamayn to launch livestock/poultry project.





Veterinary services to hundreds of cattle owner in Daraa, September 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Health and PSS consultations for 500 HH in Dara, September 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.





Rehabilitation of five schools in Homs and Damascus rural, September 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



Startup kits for 22 youth in Damascus rural, September 2020, photo credit: Diakonia.



*Child Protection training for 45 teachers from Damascus rural, September 2020, photo credit: Diakonia*

## 8. CONCLUSION

MECC continues its fight against COVID-19 using all means at its disposal. However, the pandemic appears to be spreading at exponential rates and therefore requires a new set of policies to assist hospitals and medical staff to address the worsening situation. Unfortunately, political tensions presiding over everything within the region are preventing governments to compose a comprehensive and serious containment strategy.