



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

DIAKONIA DEPARTMENT- SERVICE IN DIGNITY

Rescue Syria Update - 11

March 17th 2023



Homeless in Jableh are residing in gardens after being evacuated from their affected homes

"Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." - Luke 6:20 (NIV)

Searching for Hope Amidst Pain

Only if it was possible for us to change the course of events in our lives and rewrite them in a fairer way, thousands of people could have saved themselves from the injustice they were forced to endure...They could have saved themselves from the injustice that the war had thrown their way, and then the natural disasters came to complete what had been neglected during the 12 years of war, bombing, displacement, death, and oppressive economic sanctions.

Only then... will the Syrians have a chance to restore at least a small part of calm and peace to their lives, so that they can return to what they were before the year 2011, after which many calamities followed; Only then will they be able to rest from the burdens of displacement, poverty, and need. It is possible for those who walk in the streets of Aleppo, Lattakia, and Jableh to notice the sadness and gloom imprinted on people's faces, as they are tired of the weight of the loads, but despite that, they still carry in their hearts hope for a better tomorrow, leaning on the church despite their race and religion. Most of the people who left their homes terrified and afraid because of the earthquake took refuge in churches which, as usual, embraced and supported everyone, and are still working for them through the Ecumenical Committee for Relief Work that MECC called for after the disaster of the earthquake, and which began its work in affected areas translating wishes and prayers for church unity into actions that serves Christians and non-Christians equally and ensuring that they live in dignity.

It is a great achievement to live under great pressure; To resist war, displacement, poverty, loss, lack of electricity, disasters, and epidemics, as the people of Aleppo, Lattakia, and Jableh did, and to hold on to a thin thread of hidden hope to continue living life, knowing that the future under the current circumstances is an unknown future with no clear signs... This in itself is a great achievement for people who want life.

Highlights

According to the declaration of the Minister of Local Administration -the Chairman of the Higher Committee for Relief- the number of buildings that collapsed directly in the areas controlled-governorates at the moment of the earthquake is 199. While the number of displaced people reached 297,950 people, including 153,000 in Aleppo, 142,420 in Lattakia, and 1330 in Hama, 759 in Tartous, and 441 in Homs. There are more than 600 damaged schools, some of which need to be demolished and rebuilt. The total number of shelters reached 226.¹ Seven hospitals and 145 health facilities have been damaged across Syria, with more than 10,200 injured people, mainly orthopedic trauma, with high risk of wound infection and tetanus.²

In Aleppo. The number of displaced families who have been hosted in collective shelter reached 19,319 families, with a number of 83,172 persons. Out of 19.319 families, about 2,404 families left their homes because they were not safe to return but repairable; Approximately, 578 families left their homes because they were not safe to return to and could not be repaired; While, 7779 families can return to their homes because it is safe. The number of collective shelter is 108. The rehabilitation process of 17 new shelters began after the second earthquake that occurred on February 20, 2023.³

[1] Syria steps, 26 Feb, Chairman of the Higher Committee for Relief

[2] OCHA, Syria Earthquake March 2023 Government-Controlled Areas

[3] Relief sub-committee in Aleppo

Damaged buildings

01 In Aleppo

In Aleppo, as a result of a constructional integrity assessment for 19,290 buildings, it was found that 14535 is a safe building to return to. About 4,095 Buildings not safe to return to but repairable. While, 56 buildings were destroyed during the earthquake and approximately, 286 buildings were demolished due to the earthquake. About 181 schools are lightly damaged.⁴

02 In Hama

The damage that occurred in the governorate due to the devastating earthquake resulted in 7,150 houses being completely or partially damaged, in addition to about 265 schools, 131 drinking water tanks and about 116 government buildings, in a preliminary toll that can be increased. About 500 homes have been evacuated in various regions of the governorate.⁵

03 In Lattakia

The number of completely damaged buildings in Lattakia governorate reached 336 buildings that must be evacuated and demolished. The number of damaged buildings that need to be strengthened reached 1697 buildings, while the damaged buildings that need light maintenance amounted to 5819 buildings, stressing that the engineering committees initiated by the Lattakia engineering syndicate and governorate continue their works.



[4] Relief sub-committee in Aleppo

[5] OCHA, Syria Earthquake March 2023 Government-Controlled Areas

Needs

Before the earthquake hit Syria, people lived in dire conditions due to the shortage of job opportunities and the low-income level, especially for those working in the governmental sector, where the monthly salaries were reported to reach less than 20 USD per month, While the Syrian pound continues to decline against the dollar, to record 7,550 pounds against one dollar on March 13. Food prices keep rising and markets remain impacted by the earthquake. Increase in the cost of wheat flour as well as bread availability shortage in Aleppo and Lattakia.⁶ The Priority needs of the earthquake-affected people: Repairing damaged homes, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), food assistance, NFIs, hygiene and dignity kits, shelter, water, sanitation, food and cash assistance.⁷



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[6] OCHA, Syria Earthquake March 2023 Government-Controlled Areas

[7] OCHA, Syria earthquake march 2023, 10 Mar

MECC response in Aleppo and Central Syria

In Central Syria, The Middle East Council of Churches completed the distribution of 500 blankets to 139 displaced families residing these days in Christian valley. Preparations are taking place to target many families in Hama governorates as we as central Syria with lifesaving items.

The Engineering teams in Aleppo are continuing their technical assessments to verify the structural status of many buildings to verify which building needs emergency intervention as well those who are safe and need minor repair in addition to buildings that require quick evacuation due to its risk structure. To date the assigned engineering teams completed the visit of 445 buildings, of 445 buildings there are 6 buildings that require evacuation as they are too risky for inhabitants, 63 buildings need technical support and 376 buildings are safe and require different level of repairs and has no technical risk at all. As of the status of apartments, 1252 unites were checked, of 1252 unites, there are 178 units that are in good shape, 1038 units require minor repair and 36 units require major repair but structurally safe.

To accelerate the process, MECC has assigned an engineering study house in order to do the technical study with the estimated cost in order to prepare the following procurement phases to sign contracts with eligible contractors to do the required support in affected buildings the soonest.



Technical assessments from Engineering teams in Aleppo



Technical assessments from Engineering teams in Aleppo

Along with this significant activity that the council is conducting today, distribution of food and nonfood items is continuing to many families in need in Aleppo. 2300 families received such aids to date. The council is coordinating its emergency and relief activities with the assigned ecumenical relief committee in Aleppo.



Distribution of food kits in Aleppo



Distribution of hygiene kits in Aleppo

Testimonies From the Field

T says: "We returned from Beirut just five months before the earthquake struck. My husband worked there as a seller of women's bags and shoes. After the explosion in Beirut, my son developed a stutter, so I came to Aleppo and had him treated by specialists who were able to help him. When we decided to return to our homeland and city of Aleppo because we were tired of being away, we did not expect that displacement was waiting for us here. The living situation is very bad, prices are high, and the cost of living is very expensive, and the earthquake added a new disaster to our lives. The earthquake experience was a harsh one. Despite more than a month passing since the earthquake, we still remember the horror and fear we felt... I held my children and we began to pray, then we sought refuge in the church and have been living in the church hall ever since, which has become a shelter center. Our house has cracked due to the earthquake, and we cannot live in it. I do not know what awaits us; my husband and I do not work, and we have two young youths aged 12 and 16, and we need money to secure a decent life for them. Today, we received health supplies and a food basket. This assistance is very useful to us because we are in dire need of any help that saves us money and eases the burden of expenses."



Victoria (24 years old) says: "On the day the earthquake hit Aleppo, we were sleeping and woke up to a slight shaking that intensified... We could hear the sound of rocks falling around us, people screaming in terror, and children crying. I couldn't comprehend what was happening and I was screaming out of fear. We left our home and went to the street, where we could hear a loud noise coming from under the ground. The rain was pouring heavily, the wind was strong, and the weather was very cold. The minaret of the mosque fell, and stones were falling from the church. It was a terrible disaster. We have been staying in the church hall since the day of the earthquake. The food basket provided by MECC has been very helpful because we didn't take any money with us when we left our home, and we couldn't buy food. The health kit is equally important as the food basket because we need to clean the place where we are staying, and there are many people staying here, so we need soap, tissues, a scrubber, toothpaste, and other items that may seem trivial but are very important to us."

H (57 years old) says: "When the earthquake hit Aleppo, we fled our home barefoot and took refuge in the church, where we have been living ever since. The assistance we received meets our needs and saves us money. We also need financial aid so that we can rent a home where we can live and have privacy. The house I was living in was not mine and it suffered major cracks, so I cannot return to it again. Rent prices for homes have become very high after the earthquake disaster. I work as a taxi driver, and what I earn is hardly enough to meet my family's needs for food and clothing."

Video Reports :

click on picture to access the videos



1- Syria Is in Distress Due to the Earthquake that Hit It
Video - Safir Salim Describes the Situation in the Salesian Church in Aleppo



2- Moments of Terror Following the Earthquake that Struck Syria
Video - Georges Batikha Survives the Disaster and Highlights the Urgent Needs



3- Searching for Hope Following the Earthquake that Hit Syria
Video - Rogina Makhoul Describes the Fear of the Afflicted Families and Children



4- An Interview with His Eminence Ephraim Maalouli, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, Alexandretta and Dependencies, after the Earthquake that Struck Syria



5- A New Baby Born in Earthquake Rubble
Mohamad Bitar Explains the Difficult Situations He Passed Through with His Family



6- In Seconds... Everything Changed
Manal Bitar Reports the First Moments of Terror



6 - Interview with His Eminence Archbishop Mor Boutros Kassis
Following the Earthquake that Shook the North of the Antiochian Levant

Photo Albums :

click on picture to access the albums



Album 1- The Scenes of Destructions in Syria
In Some Photos Taken by MECC



Album 2- Difficult Humanitarian Conditions in Syria
New Photos Shows the Massive Disaster



Album 3- Photos from the Heart of the Tragedy in Syria



Album 4- Photos Showing the Bitter Humanitarian
Situations in Syria