“The Document on Human Fraternity”
a New Constitution for Global Peace and Coexistence

His Beatitude John X Yazigi
Eastern Christianity and Bearing the Cross Towards resurrection

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Declaring intentions in the «Document on Human Fraternity»...

The «International Ecumenical Youth Meeting»
in Beirut, March 2019
A Levantine Spring and a Sign of Hope
LETTER OF THE PRESIDENT

Eastern Christianity and Bearing the Cross Towards resurrection

We are much pleased to make this editorial for Al Muntada Magazine published by the Middle East Council of Churches. MECC is considered as one of the forms or rather formulas that express our longing as Christians of the East to speak a common word and have one united position towards the many issues that we are facing, on the basis of the common Christian heritage and authentic tradition that unite us.

We have always wanted this Council to express our yearning for solidarity among the Levantine Christians, that would protect the identity and legacy proper to every church, while opening up on dialogue and encounter, seeking to bring out what we have in common, at a time where there are many attempts to promote dissension in the world. Perhaps one of the unique characteristics of the Levantine Christianity’s witness to Jesus Christ is that it comes from diverse cultures and civilizations, integrating into the historical and geographical contexts, and thus preserving the faith for two thousand years now, as a live authentication of these words by the author of Acts of the Apostles “the disciples were called Christians in Antioch first” (Acts 26 :11). To be called Christians not just in words, but ontologically, in life and deed. I could even say that the path of Christians in the Levant abridges and reflects the life of our glorious Lord Jesus. The Eastern Christianity has always been generated by bearing the cross, in the confident hope that resurrection will dawn. This is probably what implanted it in this homeland and also spread it in this world as a truthful leaven of the Gospel’s genuineness.

As Christians of the East, we are accountable and responsible of making the world hear us saying words of power, solidarity, and unity. The gospel went out of this land as one Christian witness, two thousand years ago. Today, we are asked to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ by seeking to be one, so that our witness to Him be enriched with both authenticity and love.

We pray and work for MECC to play a more active role in the East be in thorough collaboration with the Churches of all families. This Council was born from the womb of the Levantine Christianity. It is called first and foremost to be an active voice that always respects the particularities of every member Church and that tries by and through these Churches to bear a common witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

John X - Patriarch of Antioch and all the East for the Greek Orthodox Church
After a long absence (since 2008), “Al Muntada” magazine has been re-launched by the Middle East Council of Churches. The new form of the magazine had been founded by Honorary Secretary General, Reverend Father Michel Al-Jalkh on July 2016. At the time of the Holy Resurrection, “Al Muntada” is published to prove and proclaim once again that “Christ is risen, trampling death by death and he gave life to those in the graves.”

“Al Muntada” is a free space and platform for any thinker and believer who wishes to express his “uncensored” positions and opinions on the role and mission of the churches in the Middle East and on the importance of coexistence with believers from other religions, as well as the importance of working together to preserve human dignity and freedom of belief and conscience, in the context of an inclusive “citizenship.” We wanted this magazine to be a free space for each pen that addresses the heart, mind and conscience at the same time, and in which we insist on our commitment to move forward in activating and strengthening the culture of freedom and tolerance.

We now leave it to the Church officials to share their vision of the future and of the challenges they are looking to meet with faith and boldness.

We will stop to gaze at the city of Abu Dhabi and to the “Document on Human Fraternity” initiated by Pope Francis and Imam Abu el Tayeb, as a sign of hope that life has the last word in history and that the glorious resurrection which we celebrate today is bound to come to the Middle East and the entire world.

MECC Secretary General
Dr Souaraya Bechealany
"The Document on Human Fraternity", a New Constitution for Global Peace and Coexistence

THE "DOCUMENT ON HUMAN FRATERNITY" SIGNED BY THE APOSTLES OF PEACE, HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS AND SHEIKH AHMED EL-TAYEB, GRAND IMAM OF AL-AZHAR, AS THE CULMINATION OF THE HUMAN FRATERNITY MEETING IN ABU DHABI, UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HIS HIGHNESS THE CROWN PRINCE SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN ZAYED AL NAYHAN, FORMED A HISTORIC MOVE UNDER THE AMAZED EYES OF LEADERS, CLERGYMEN AND FAITHFUL WITNESSED AS A NEW GLOBAL CONSTITUTION FOR PEACE, DIALOGUE AND COEXISTENCE.

THERE ARE MANY EXPECTATIONS FROM THIS DOCUMENT, AND GREAT LONGING IN THE HEARTS OF BELIEVERS TO WITNESS THE INEVITABLE AND NECESSARY HISTORIC TRANSFORMATION AS A PRAGMATIC RESULT OF THIS DECLARATION AND THE COVENANT MADE BY THE PEOPLE TO THE LORD OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.

In the introduction of the document, the two leaders wrote: “Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved... from the meeting that expressed profound hope in a bright future for all human beings, the idea of this Document on Human Fraternity was conceived. It is a text that has been given honest and serious thought so as to be a joint declaration of good and heartfelt aspirations. It is a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.

In this issue of "Al Muntada", we come back to excerpts from the "Document on Human Fraternity" that we consider able to change history, were their lofty content to be put into practice. We also publish articles by experts in Christian-Muslim dialogue. It is an attempt to think together and to answer the question: What will happen after the document? Where will all our hopes go?
We, who believe in God and in the final meeting with Him and His judgment, on the basis of our religious and moral responsibility, and through this Document, call upon ourselves, upon the leaders of the world as well as the architects of international policy and world economy, to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace; to intervene at the earliest opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood and bring an end to wars, conflicts, environmental decay and the moral and cultural decline that the world is presently experiencing. We call upon intellectuals, philosophers, religious figures, artists, media professionals and men and women of culture in every part of the world, to rediscover the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence in order to confirm the importance of these values as anchors of salvation for all, and to promote them everywhere.

Moreover, we resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women in order to make them act in a way that has nothing to do with the truth of religion. This is done for the purpose of achieving objectives that are political, economic, worldly and short-sighted. We thus call upon all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression. We ask this on the basis of our common belief in God who did not create men and women to be killed or to fight one another, nor to be tortured or humiliated in their lives and circumstances. God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorize people.

The concept of citizenship is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice. It is therefore crucial to establish in our societies the concept of full citizenship and reject the discriminatory use of the term minorities which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority. Its misuse paves the way for hostility and discord; it undoes any successes and takes away the religious and civil rights of some citizens who are thus discriminated against.

Good relations between East and West are indisputably necessary for both. They must not be neglected, so that each can be enriched by the other’s culture through fruitful exchange and dialogue. The West can discover in the East remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism. And the East can find in the West many elements that can help free it from weakness, division, conflict and scientific, technical and cultural decline. It is important to pay attention to religious, cultural and historical differences that are a vital component in shaping the character, culture and civilization of the East. It is likewise important to reinforce the bond of fundamental human rights in order to help ensure a dignified life for all the men and women of East and West, avoiding the politics of double standards.

Al-Azhar and the Catholic Church ask that this Document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of formation, thus helping to educate new generations to bring goodness and peace to others, and to be defenders everywhere of the rights of the oppressed and of the least of our brothers and sisters.

This Declaration may constitute an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, indeed among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will; This Declaration may be a sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South, and between all who believe that God has created us to understand one another, cooperate with one another and live as brothers and sisters who love one another.

Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019
His Holiness Pope Francis The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb
FEATURE FILE
THE DOCUMENT ON HUMAN FRATERNITY

The Document on Human Fraternity"
Is Not Just About Declaring Good Intentions

Judge Abbas Al-Halabi
President of the Arab Team for Muslim-Christian Dialogue

As the culmination of Pope Francis’ visit to the United Arab Emirates, and at the occasion UAE proclaiming this year the Year of Tolerance, and as the result of the Pope’s meeting with the Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, the "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Coexistence" was issued, with an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction outlines the principles on which the document was based, most notably the unity of faith and the desire to provide assistance to every human being, especially the weak and the neediest and destitute. The fraternal talks that brought together the poles of Christianity and Islam have resulted in a common declaration based on good and sincere intentions so that this document will serve as a guide for future generations to foster a culture of mutual respect in order to realize the great divine grace.

Equal and Responsible
Since the document was listed in the name of those who were issued from God the Creator of all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity and in the name of the human soul which God has prohibited to make suffer and in the name of the poor, the wretched, the deprived, the marginalized, the orphans, the widows, the peoples, the human fraternity, freedom, justice, mercy and persons of good will, this document is directed to intellectuals, philosophers, clergymen, artists, media, creators and others. The document presented the positive aspects of modern civilization. On the other hand, it painted a grim scene of the decline of spiritual values and sense of responsibility, and how religious extremism, nationalism and intolerance have produced phenomena in the world, whether in the West or in the East.

It also presented the consequences of the political crises that unjustly resulted in the lack of equity in wealth distribution and fatal crises despite the wealth. It categorized the family as an indispensable nucleus of society and humanity, and the importance of awakening the religious sense, and also emphasizing that the goal of religions first and foremost is faith in God and worship. Religions have never been a source of war, hatred, hostility, fanaticism, violence nor bloodshed.

Here, the document referred to the previous global documents that pointed out the importance of the role of religions and emphasized a number of new concepts for building world peace:
- The correct teachings of religions call for adherence to the values of peace and uphold the values of mutual acquaintance and brotherhood of humanity and coexistence.
- Freedom is the right of every human being
- Justice is based on mercy
- The dialogue is based on understanding and spreading a culture of tolerance and acceptance of the other
- Dialogue between believers means meeting the vast forgiveness of spiritual and human values.
- The protection of places of worship is a duty and their targeting is a departure from the teachings of religions.
- Terrorism threatens the security of people east and west to the north and south.
- Citizenship must be based on equality in duties and rights.
- It requires renunciation of the use of the term minorities.
- There is no need to establish a relationship between East and West and to highlight the vitality of its necessity and importance.
- Recognition is the right of women to education, work and exercise their political rights.
- Emphasize the rights of children
- The need to protect the elderly, the weak and people with special needs

Pledge and Symbolism
In conclusion, this document highlights the commitment of the two authorities to convey it to global decision-makers, religious leaders, organizations and institutions, and to become a subject of research in schools, universities and institutes. The aim of this document is to call for reconciliation and brotherhood. Between East, West, North and South in order to reach a universal peace in which everyone is entitled. However, beyond this document, a number of issues relating to the symbolism of the place from which it was issued, the symbolism of the two poles that developed it and the evolution represented by this document in relation to other earlier documents, must be looked upon.

Indeed, the declaration of the United Arab Emirates in 2019 as a year of tolerance allowed this country to bring the two poles to its care. The UAE hosts residents from more than 200 nationalities who practice a multitude of religions from different countries in the world, and different religious identities, not only from monotheistic religions but even from other faiths, in freedom of belief and worship. More than 47 temples and churches enable believers to practice their religious rites freely but under the law and public order of the state.

The broad minded leadership of the State, endowed with deep faith, as well as intellectual, religious and cultural tolerance, has enabled not only all the residents to earn their living freely, but also to exercise their religious life freely.

It also provided the opportunity for the pope for the first time in history to set foot on the Arabian Peninsula, the cradle of Islam and Muslims in total tolerance. This visit was demonstrated by a festive mass at the Zayed Sports Complex, attended by more than one hundred and thirty thousand people, among them Muslims from different Arab countries.

Trust and Sorrow
What also manifests the success of Pope Francis’ visit is that, unlike his predecessors, he has always had a higher level of sympathy for the oppressed and the burdened. The marginalized, the poor and the needy occupy the first rank of importance in his papacy, as we have seen in many situations and events.

In this sense, he is also sympathetic to the injustice done to Islam in terms of the charging it with terrorism and
violence, while it is the most widely embraced religion in the world. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, who for years has been sponsoring conferences, meetings and discussions that led to issuing several documents. Some of those are related to Egypt as a special case, and others are related to general principles such as freedoms of religion, of citizenship and others. These paved the way to a solid relationship with the Copts in his country, and with Christians in General in the Arab Levant and asserting that they are equal citizens with their Muslim brethren, with equal rights and duties, not a minority living in a majority, but that they are all Muslim and Christian citizens in a constitutional, national, and civic state.

As active in the Muslim-Christian dialogue, we are sorry to see that such an event as the Pope’s meeting with the sheikh of Al-Azhar or the signature of the Document on Human Fraternity, did not take place in Lebanon, the country entrusted with the mission of coexistence in this East. The Pope should have made this declaration from a country with an indigenous Christian population, not like the UAE, where they are expatriates.

Nonetheless, for some time now, the Lebanese have not been faithful to Lebanon’s message for a long time, but have been wasting the peculiarity of this country in the wars and disputes, while the Lebanese government seeks to host the Academy of the World Dialogue between Cultures and Religions.

However, before hosting this center, it is necessary to seek to ensure civil peace between the Lebanese factions, reduce the current political tensions, protect Lebanon from external interference in its internal affairs and stop some Lebanese groups from using foreign powers to force their views on their compatriots.

Program and Action
The UAE has occupied the economic, financial and banking ranking where Lebanon has been for many years, but Lebanon has the advantage of coexistence. Therefore, The UAE initiative is to take this Lebanese characteristic and transfer it to the UAE, in a way that Lebanon has become almost devoid of all its peculiarities. However, the UAE is not to blame, but the Lebanese themselves, who did unfortunately contribute in this downturn.

We hope that this document will not be like other documents that we celebrate for a moment, to be soon forgotten. We hope that it will be a real program with the appropriate mechanism to be implemented. Some of this mechanism is included in the document and called international decision-makers, institutes, schools, universities, religious and social institutions, to use it and transform it from a rigid document to an effective one that is actually striving to fulfill world peace, which is most needed in our time.

Rising Against Confused Dogmas!
Ziad El-Sayegh
MECC Policies and Communication Advisor

The historic meeting between Pope Francis and the Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayeb in Abu Dhabi calls for a deep understanding of the UAE remarkable initiative on one hand and the courage of both the Pope and the Imam at a time where populism is wreaking havoc. Both the initiative and the courage reflect values that rise against confused dogmas.

However, this historic meeting and the comprehensive outcome document necessitate a practical follow-up reflecting the historic theology and jurisprudence where the merits of unity stem from plurality; the unity of humanity before God, irrespective of the expressional divergences or faith-based facts.

The reference to liturgy and jurisprudence from a historic perspective is a must amidst the race between moderation and the rise of extremism. The bloody crime committed in New Zealand and Sri Lanka proves the deadly alliance amidst extremists from both religions. A peaceful approach to the practicalities of this objective alliance setting aside any religious imbrication is needed; religion being used as an aggravating factor in conflicts.

Here, the cultural, economic, social and political factors supersede religion. The dilemma lies in the positioning of the religious factor amidst an ideological system demonizing the other based on the aforementioned factors. Henceforth, one must look into how this event has moved to the west and how the choices of some have changed in the repression of migrant refugees, how it has moved from the square of national fusion to a crisis in the management of plurality. It is not true that confrontation
THE DOCUMENT ON HUMAN FRATERNITY

by Dr. Ahmad Al-Zohbi

A Triumph for Tolerance and Mercy

An exceptional Pope

To begin with, it is essential to remember that Pope Francis is an exceptional figure, representing a new kind of popes, a personality unprecedented in the Catholic Church, with unique vision, aspirations and relationship with Muslims. He is in a true solidarity, in word and deed, with the strife of the poor and the suffering around the world, and on numerous occasions has sent special signs of affection towards Muslims as the most distressed among the nations, and as the largest religion in the world in terms of the number of adherents, is subject to injustice by the people of other religions, and by Western countries in particular. Pope Francis was in all his positions and his constant moves a man of peace, dialogue, and coexistence, a man of friendship towards Muslims, and a man to defend just causes.

Immediately after assuming the Holy See back in 2013, he took the name Francis. Francis lived in Assisi in Southern Italy. He is the monk who founded the Franciscan order. He lived in the middle of the fourteenth century and gathered around him a group of wandering monks who are keen not to have anything alike Jesus Christ and to serve the poor who were stricken by wars and plagues at that time. But what many do not know about that monk is that he was very keen on and confident about making peace with the Muslims, and step out of the Crusades. He even met King Al Kamil Al Ayubi, Sultan of Egypt, who had a treaty with the Crusaders and handed over Jerusalem and on the guidance of monk of

ECUMENICAL SUCCESS

Some might think that with the rising star of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish extremist right, the latter daring proclaim the Juduaty of Israel, hence denying the right of the Palestinian refugees to return or the right to those living inside Israel to a peer to peer citizenship, this problematic must have emanated from the misuse of religion for racist reasons. However, one must be concerned with the fact that the failure of the religious educational system in proving that it is free of extremism, assumes a search in restructuring the system around the religious social responsibility more than just generalizing purely dogmatic concepts. That was the main intention of the document: the use of social justice as a cornerstone to a regulatory system where pluralism meets the good governance of joint resources in avoidance of any disaster arising from injustice, wars, occupation, migration, refugees to name a few among the most frightening characteristics of today’s world.

The document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together marks the beginning of a serious rise against religious demagogy and is the cornerstone for a return to the origins. The challenge lies today in having the religious, Christian and Muslim references translate it into public policies where many fault lines are surfacing. The document reflects the success of the ecumenical choice in living together.

THE DOCUMENT ON HUMAN FRATERNITY

"The Document on Human Fraternity"

A Triumph for Tolerance and Mercy

Dr. Ahmad Al-Zohbi

Researcher and University Professor

 Ecumenical Success

In any ways, the document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together declares that religion must not be used to incite violence. It has affirmed the “importance of awakening religious awareness and the need to revive this awareness in the hearts of new generations through sound education and an adherence to moral values and upright religious teachings. In this way we can confront tendencies that are individualistic, selfish, conflicting, and also address radicalism and blind extremism in all its forms and expressions”.

This religious awareness is noteworthy in this part of the document as it discusses religious awakening though it is at the same time controversial. This controversy revolves around the fact that this awareness is expressed, so far, by means of a “violent awareness” and a “seclusive awareness”. Was this not what we had witnessed in the Middle East and the Arab World in the past ten years? Is this not what we have encountered in the West in the past two years especially with voices rising and saying that western societies are facing a tremendous identity change?

Pure Religious Awareness

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Assisi, Pope Francis says it is not only an entrance for the poor and tormented, but also the for relations of affection with Muslims.

The new element in the relationship between Pope Francis and the Muslims is that the Pope speaks of the Muslim faith. Unlike the old traditional ecclesiastical texts (for example, Vatican II, 1965-1962) that describe Muslims as people who worship God, and belong to Abraham, Pope Francis speaks of Muslims, and Islam as a religion of faith, peace and mercy for all human beings, and considers that the wars of the past, and the terrorist events in the present, should become lessons to learn.

Furthermore, Pope Francis stated that he considered Islam as the religion of mercy and charity in 2016. He made 2016 the year of mercy, 2017 a year to fight poverty, 2018 the year for hospitality and the rights of migrants and refugees. Before the UAE, he had visited cities of the Muslim world, such as Palestine and Jordan in 2014, Egypt in 2017, and after Abu Dhabi in February 2019 he will visit Morocco in March.

The meeting of Pope Francis with the Sheikh of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi was not the first of its kind. The two were acquainted and linked by affection. Sheikh el-Tayeb received the pope in Egypt in 2017 and they were there to witness a number of important statements on fighting against extremism and terrorism, and promoting citizenship and coexistence. "The Document on Human Fraternity", which is somewhat similar to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it is based on religious and moral values such as mercy, love, equity, acceptance of the other, righteousness and wealth, and the pursuit of peace and brotherhood, thus gaining exceptional importance to confront the rising rhetoric of populism, racism and extremism around the world. Establishes a new era of relations between the two most widespread religions in the world.

In fact, the revival of the value of tolerance is required not only by Muslims but also from other world religions to counter the epidemic of extremism, terrorism, Islamophobia and injustice, including Muslims in China and Burma, for example, and to urge international regimes and entities to abide by charters, which respect human rights and public freedoms, including freedom of religion and belief. These values (showing moderation and cooperative tolerance to the world), combined with sound development policies and full citizenship, guarantee human well-being, welfare, social security and effective participation, resulting in stability, progress and prosperity.

The Emirates of Tolerance
The UAE, declaring year 2019 as the year of tolerance, is proud to foster millions of humans belonging to the diverse world religions, and to hundreds of nationalities, living together in her land peacefully and freely, practicing their worship at their ease in a respectful ambiance. In the UAE, there are two great institutions for dialogue and interfaith communication, against extremism: The Council of Muslim Elders- usually presided by the Grand Imam of Al Azhar-, and the Forum for Promoting Peace (Presided by Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah). Moreover, the UAE is deploying great efforts on the international level to fight against poverty, illiteracy, and disease, and to help solving internal conflict and promoting peace. This way, the UAE will have developed tolerance from just an idea to a mission, and from a mission to general policies in governments, in media, and in education. UAE had already established a Ministry of Tolerance in its Federal government, taken in charge by Sheikh Mubarak bin Nahyan Al Nahyan.

The world is full of injustice, lacking standards and values, and so we have two options: either coexistence, tolerance, mercy, cooperation, or extremism, murder and the violating rights. There is no room for prejudice in the battle for great human values.
INTERVIEW

REVEREND JOSEPH KASSAB:

Declaring intentions in the “Document on Human Fraternity” can only be fulfilled through its pragmatic translation and the Church of the Acts of the Apostles goes walking…

Interviewed by Huguette Salameh


THE POSITIONS OF REVEREND KASSAB COME IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RENEWED VISION THAT HE CARRIES IN HIS CARE FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF THE EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY. HE TAKES HIS FIRST STEP WITH GREAT PASSION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF RESPONSIBLE DIVERSITY, YET CAUTIOUSLY, BECAUSE DIVERSITY IS FREEDOM AND FREEDOM ALLOWS A MARGIN OF "DEVIANCE"!

I do not consider that we are facing a new vision but a renewed vision. Evangelicals are not one, they are diverse and distinct even in their administrative structure. They are even distinguished in their theology, even in their understanding of “the church” in the sense, the church is organized and what is the power of each parish and whether there is hierarchy of councils in the church or otherwise. In fact, Evangelicals live in the spirit of ecumenism among each other, and are eager to be united, as they pray for each other. This is the language we use in the Middle East Council of Churches.

The Evangelicals agree on many concepts and vary in their interpretation and living. They agree, for example, on the authority of the Bible, but they are differentiated in understanding this notion. Some may be more inclined toward literal interpretation and others may be more open. Some Evangelicals are ecumenical and some prefer not to be included in the ecumenical movement, just as Catholic churches outside the Middle East.

- What about the renewed vision of Evangelical churches?

The renewed vision is how to live this diversity responsibly. How to enjoy this diversity without wasting ourselves and our presence, and without confusing others with our diversity. In diversity lies freedom, and freedom allows a margin of deviance. However, as Evangelicals, if we were to choose between freedom and any other number one choice, then of course we will choose freedom. I am always reminded of the words of the late Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazem, who spoke about the importance of order in the life of the communities, saying, “We must not forget that the most organized place is prison.”

- Where do the Evangelical Churches converge with other Christians of the East?

170 years after the founding of their Church, the Evangelicals became more rooted in this East. They are now an integral part. We are genetically part of the countries where we live. Therefore, our problems are same as those of this East, and as Christians, we cannot look at our problems in isolation from other Christians. Neither can we look at the challenges that face us in isolation from the challenges facing our fellow Muslims.

- What challenges are faced by Evangelical churches today, and what is your vision to confront them?

My presidency of the Evangelical Community in Lebanon and Syria comes 35 years after the birth of the Rev. Salim Sahiouny. The confessionalist structure in the East was imposed by the Ottomans when they asked the Evangelicals in the region “Who is the president of your church?” The Evangelicals answered that we do not have a single church president. We have several churches. The Ottomans replied that it was inevitable to name a president to represent them. The Evangelical churches then met and drew up a structure under the so-called Supreme Synod of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon, and elected a president. Since then, the president of the elected community is the head of one of the churches, often the biggest church, but he is not the head of all the Evangelical churches. Therefore, the Evangelicals do not have full authority over the President, as in the patriarchates of the other Churches. We are very happy with that and do not feel it is a shortage. There must be someone who is a pastor of the churches and does not necessarily have full clerical authority. The presidency of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community is an authority according to the system of the Synod. The Synod is an organizational legal body representing these Churches before the State in all matters pertaining to its affairs.

IN HIS INTERVIEW WITH THE MAGAZINE “EL-MUNTADA”, MANY AXES AND BOLD POLEMICAL POSITIONS CAN BE FOUND IN PASTOR KASSAB’S STATEMENTS.
Living together in a turbulent area, we share one challenge. As Martin Luther King says: “Either we find a way to live together as friends, or we die together like fools.” This is a challenge for Muslims and Christians alike. This is an explosive and radical Middle East. There is no solution but awareness, sensitization, and awakening.

I do not know why the awakening takes a fatal direction in this East. It is most important that the awakening is directed towards learning lessons from the past so that we do not repeat what happened, and learn to move towards a common human space. We yearn for human societies where people respect each other.

**-Can we talk about the special role of Evangelical churches in the East?**

The role of Evangelical churches in the East varies according to geographic location. From the start, our position in the East was related to enlightenment, so the focus was on education and hospital services... We have schools that exceed %75 non-Christian enrollment, making them a meeting place. Some of our educational institutions even exist in areas where we do not have churches, and we have not even historically sought to establish churches in them because we consider the role of schools to be spiritual. It is better to live with people and play a role in moving them to a better life. This is better than asking them to become Evangelicals.

**Confusing Texts**

**-What is your opinion about the meeting that gathered His Holiness Pope Francis and Sheikh Al-Azhar during his meeting with the Pope was a step forward?**

At the level of the declaration of intentions, yes, and at the level of signing the document as well. The step is important but not enough, it may change not our reality only unless we move to the procedures.

**-How do you see the issue of peace among religions in the Middle East?**

You should rather ask about peace in the Middle East. The urgent question today is why did all these fundamentalisms emerge at this particular time?

I am not a politician, but I am sure that the existence of Israel the way it was founded, and continuously using of oppression and repression confirm that we are not moving towards peace. On one hand, we see that Israel is capable of influencing a sympathizing West. Unfortunately, the Arab and Muslim world has not succeeded in winning the media battle and attracting international public opinion, nor has it succeeded in convincing the West of the extent of injustice that the Palestinians are subjected to today. This is on the humanitarian level. As for the level of interests, we must recognize that the superpowers have two priorities - oil and Israel’s security. Their policy is moving in this direction. Without a solution to the Palestinian issue, a comprehensive and sustainable peace will not be achieved.

**-Since you have a good relationship with Western sources of decision, as an Evangelical church, to what extent do you play an influential role?**

Evangelical churches of mainstream "Mainline Protestants", especially in the West, have lost their ability to influence politics, to be fair. There is a right-wing Evangelical awakening, which began about 30 years ago, that finally decided in a way that is...
INTERVIEW
REVEREND JOSEPH KASSAB

inconsistent with its historical theological literature. In the past, they were formerly advocates of withdrawal from the world because it is a wicked and corrupt world, and better to act “as a city on a mountain.” At that time, the main Evangelical churches of Mainline Protestants were integrated into society, especially when American foreign policy during the 1950s and 1940s was more humane. They had another view of the church, not the church placed on a mountain, but with the theology of the church as the salt of the earth; it is melting to impart its taste to society. These are two theological positions that lead to a different appearance in society.

There is no doubt that traditional Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical Christianity are in decline! We have to find a different language to use with people, and this starts with the language of the Church, its theological language in dealing with young people, with contemporary issues, with women rights … Yes, there is a growing right-wing in the whole world. It is offset in the East by radicalisms of this kind. The radicalisms of the East have reached the West. These are living among us today, and we cannot overlook it.

For years, the Council has weakened and attempts have been made to create alternative councils. Why? Because there is a need for a platform that speaks for Christians in the Middle East. Today, in any major national issue, that is, on the levels of the Middle East, of Palestine, or Jerusalem, - I do not know if you have noticed - as churches we all await MECC to formulate positions and look how it approaches the issues. This is convenient, voicing a common expression of our message. We are all representatives of the Council, so it is needed. I am happy today that there are serious signs in the Council, but the main problem is that the churches do not want to invest their potential in it as it is required.

It is no secret that the largest financial support for the Council comes from Evangelicals. However, I sometimes feel that are repeatedly mentioned in talks without distinction between Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. I sometimes feel like talking about Evangelicals who do not come under the ecumenical movement, as if we are not talking about Christians. The dissension goes that far. This is sad and un-ecumenical, especially when they are ready to open dialogues with Muslims and Buddhists … At the same time, they cannot stand a different Christian group! I am talking here about religious freedom and respect for freedom of conscience. I am not talking about ecumenism, and I am speaking as the head of a community and responsible for the Evangelicals. It is not acceptable that I cannot forbear with those who disagree with me. I should have no problem seeing that some people believe in God and Christ in their own way and have different experience than mine. How can I defend my religious freedom in the Middle East and I am not able to endure their freedom? This is the fundamental issue in the approach to the unity of the Churches.

Openness is behavior, not talking. We are talking about the declaration of the document on human fraternity and the declaration of intentions and signing and this is wonderful. This is the first time that I hear the Sheikh of Al-Azhar say to the Christians of the East: “You are not minorities; you are citizens of the same nation.” This is a pioneering speech that we, the Christians of the East, must benefit from.

-We conclude with the theme of the two main programs of the Council, the ecumenical theological and diaconal relief programs oriented towards people, their concerns, their sorrows and their needs. What is your role in this regard?

In the church, all things begin with theology. Everything practiced by the Church without a theological basis becomes a political game. For example, some ask me why we read the Creed in the Evangelical Service and gather the gifts and offerings immediately after the sermon? I always reply that this is based on a theological concept: the peak of Evangelical worship service is the word, the preached word, i.e. the Evangelical text and thus the sermon. After the sermon we stand and recite the Creed in the first response to hear the word, followed by a second response in the act of giving. If every practice must be built on theology. Our theological concept defines our relief and diaconal work. This is one of the things that MECC can develop at a conference on the Council’s vision on the theology of Diakonia. MECC can reach a single constitutive document that places the theology of relief or Diakonia work to be adopted by all Eastern Churches.

The National Evangelical Synod has its relief programs that still function in Syria. It stayed only in Syria to encourage people to stay in their towns and villages. But we have also opened many social educational centers among displaced children in Lebanon. We have also provided some hospital services. We have cooperated in some of our programs with the Council and continue to do so.

We have to realize that the Church suffers today from an apostolic crisis; that it got seated in Sees! In the Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament speaks of a church that goes walking. The Middle East Council of Churches today is walking on, moving forward.
THE "INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL YOUTH MEETING"

MARCH 2019
A LEVANTINE SPRING AND A SIGN OF HOPE
THIS MARCH A LEBANESE LEVANTINE SPRING FULL OF HOPE BLOOMED AT THE "INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL YOUTH MEETING" ORGANIZED BY THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CHURCHES IN LEBANON AND THE TAIZÉ COMMUNITY IN BEIRUT (MARCH 2019, 26-22) UNDER THE THEME: “THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL GROW LIKE A CEDAR OF LEBANON”.


AS MAIN OBJECTIVES, THE MEETING FOCUSED ON VITALIZING FAITH THROUGH JOINT PRAYER AND HIGHLIGHTING THE VALUE AND RICHNESS OF ECUMENICAL RELATIONS IN LEBANON. FURTHERMORE, YOUTH FROM THE WHOLE WORLD HAD THE OCCASION TO EXPLORE THE RICH TRADITIONS OF THE EASTERN CHURCHES AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LONG EXPERIENCE OF COEXISTENCE BETWEEN LEBANON’S CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS.

PARTICIPANTS FROM OUTSIDE LEBANON WERE HOSTED BY LEBANESE FAMILIES AND VOLUNTEER INSTITUTIONS FROM VARIOUS CHURCHES IN THE GREATER BEIRUT AREA. MORNING PRAYERS, SPIRITUAL TOPICS AND SHARING EXPERIENCES TOOK PLACE IN THE RESPECTIVE ECCLESIAL CENTERS WHILE MAIN ACTIVITIES TOOK PLACE IN DOWNTOWN BEIRUT EVERY AFTERNOON. THE MAJOR PRAYERS WERE HELD AT THE SEASIDE ARENA.

"Our relationship with Lebanon is old. We believe and see that the power of peace in this country is stronger than anything else. Christians can engage in a dialogue with Muslims in this country, and Lebanon can be a gateway of understanding between East and West. This relationship is fundamental to Lebanon, it’s true, but also to humanity."

Brother Alois, The prior of the Taizé Community

"We do not seek the fusion of the churches, but as it has been from the beginning, we insist on our diversity. In the unity of diversity, we witness for Jesus Christ, we witness the unification of the churches in their liturgical and theological diversity. It is our duty to face the real situation with our youth and to find their active role. Our churches should bear their responsibility by taking care of the youth. The church is the mother of all young people and when governments fail in their duties, we, as churches, should help them in their education, work-life and housing. We constantly call upon the youth to get rooted. Yet, what are we doing for them to take root?"

Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches Dr. Souraya Bechaalany
Final Statement

The Middle East Council of Churches
Concluding the International Ecumenical Youth Meeting
1600 Young People from 43 Countries Declared Aloud:
Our Unity is in Our Diversity

At the end of the International Ecumenical Youth Meeting held in Beirut on March 2019 26-22, that hosted 1600 young people from 43 countries, the Middle East Council of Churches and the representatives of the Churches of Lebanon, together with the Taizé Ecumenical Community declare the following:

a- The young people who participated in this meeting have clearly manifested a prophetic boldness to stand for tolerance, dialogue, and coexistence, in a way to be immunized against the currents of prejudice and conflicts lead by national racist and populist tendencies. Their steadfastness in this choice that reflects the Gospel is a strong proof of their respect to the human dignity, regardless of religious identity. Hence, they are much appreciated.

b- The churches have proved their capacity for ecumenical collaboration in an action that was based on theological perspective and a fellowship of deep prayer. Therefore, we address much love and appreciation to the leaders of our Churches.

c- The Lebanese families that hosted the young people coming to Lebanon have proved that they are very well rooted in the values of encountering the others, of welcoming them, and of realizing the particularity of the people that came to share their days of prayer and meditation. To these families we address all our love and appreciation.

d- The Taizé Community proved that it holds in its heart, mind, prayer, and being, the suffering and hopes of the youth around the world, especially those who are fighting for peace and coexistence in the Middle East. The Taizé community has a special prayer for the brothers to keep holding the lit flame of ecumenism.

e- The Christian-Muslim meeting, organized by the Adyan Foundation under the theme “Together around Our Lady Mary”, proved that no matter how some people try to destroy coexistence, the path that brings us together in the expectation of love will stay stronger, more effective, and more influential. Hence, we extend our thanks to the Adyan Foundation, wishing that it continues further in building bridges.

f- The Lebanese Media, without exception, and mainly our partners showed a great responsibility in broadcasting the core of the event, away from folkish tendencies. This asserts the commitment of the Lebanese Media in backing edifying initiatives despite all the challenges. Therefore, we address our many thanks and prayers, may the Lord grant them to remain the voice of truth.

The Middle East Council of Churches promises the youth to continue its ecumenical mission, inviting all the people of good will to promote fruitful initiatives of love and encounter in these times, difficult, yet full of the hope of resurrection.

The Middle East Council of Churches
Communication and Public Relations Department
We express our solidarity with the sons of Church who bear witness for the Lord Jesus amid all challenges in the East

The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches held its third meeting at the Patriarchal See of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, in Atchane – Bikfaya, Lebanon, 23-22 January 2019. The meeting was presided by His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II – Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church, and MECC President for the Oriental Orthodox Family, by His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans, MECC President for the Catholic Family, and by Right Reverend Dr. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon, and MECC President Council for the Evangelical Family, his Beatitude Youhanna X Yazigi, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East.

Thereafter, the Committee concluded its meetings and declared the following:

First, the participants pray that the constitutional institutions in Lebanon be restored to their normal status, especially pleading for the establishment of a new Government, for peace in Syria, a safe and dignified return for the displaced to their homeland, and for peace and security in Iraq, allowing the return of its uprooted sons to their fatherland. They asked God for the establishment of the Palestinian State according to the international resolutions, for the return of the Palestinian refugees preserving their national identity and rejecting the declaration of Jerusalem as the Capital of the Israel. They solicit the support of stability in Jordan, and commend the opening of the Christ Cathedral, as well as Al-Fatah Al-Alim Mosque in Egypt which is a sign of national unity. The Committee calls as well for enhancing the dialogues towards the unification of the island of Cyprus.

Second, the participants call the international community and the Arab world to deploy all efforts to release the kidnapped bishops Yohana Ibrahim and Boulos Yaziji, as well as all the kidnapped priests and lay people. They condemn all forms of extremism and terrorism. They hope for cooperation between the Churches and the Islamic authorities, in order to develop a rational religious discourse built on the values of love, peace, social justice and dialogue, as well as to establish a roadmap to collaborate in formulating inclusive citizenship.

Third, the participants condemn the unfair and vicious attack on the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Occupied Palestine led by one of the Zionist institutions. The program was established by the World Council of Churches in 2002, at the request of the Church leaders in Jerusalem.

Finally, everyone raised their prayer to the Lord Jesus, who unites them in love, putting once more their hope in the Lord, "the Source of all hope and consolation," trusting His guidance to continue working in common witness for the God of love, mercy and peace. They also expressed their solidarity with the sons and daughters of the Oriental Churches, who bear witness for the Lord Jesus Christ amid the challenges, because "whoever trusts in God is not ashamed" (Psalm 1:70).
General Secretariat Activities: In 2018, Dr. Souraya Bechealany was appointed as the first female Secretary General of MECC. Since her arrival many crucial events took place allowing MECC to take an exceptional attention.

Participations

**Global Christian Forum’s Third Global Gathering in Bogota, Columbia**
27-24 April 2018

MECC Eastern Orthodox President Moran Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, and the Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany, attended the gathering, where Dr. Bechealany had a presentation entitled “Facing Common Challenges Together with Hope”.

**Partner’s Meeting in Lebanon**
8 to 10 May 2018

The 2018 meeting from 8 to 10 May held in Deir Saydet el Bir in Bkennaya was attended by 75 people which included regional religious leaders and international partners. Three themes were discussed: ecumenism and interfaith, communications and advocacy, and relief and development. International partners also received an update about the financial situation and what projects have been implemented so far. Meeting between Middle East Heads of Churches and Pope Francis at Bari Italy 7 July 2018
Nearly all the heads of Middle East Churches gathered with Pope Francis, on July 2018, where more than 50,000 people attended

**The World Conference on Xenophobia, Racism, and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration 20 -18 September 2018**
Represented by Mr Ziad el Sayegh, from 18 to 20 of September, MECC attended the conference on Xenophobia in Rome. El Sayegh spoke about the failures of human development programs and their implications on future generations. The meeting, which saw the gathering four religious leaders from, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Islamic traditions, discussed the problem of xenophobia which had transcend national and religious boundaries.

**The Holy Scriptures in the Changing World Conference**
On October 2018, Father Gabriel Hachem the director of the Ecumenical and theological department of MECC attended The Holy Scriptures in the Changing World conference held in in Etchmiadzin - Armenia. The Eastern and the Oriental Orthodox Churches participated in the Conference, where a Memorandum of Understanding and Collaboration was signed between these Churches and the United Bible Societies.

**UNHCR-MECC MEETING**
During the October 2018, meeting at the council’s headquarters in Beirut, Dr. Souraya Bechealany met with Mireille Girard UNHCR representative in Lebanon. At the meeting the Secretary General in the Middle East Council of Churches discussed ways to enhance collaboration with the UNHCR for effective measures to help refugees and to assist poor Lebanese communities.

Dr Bechealany also emphasized about MECC’s coalition with local and international partners regarding programs in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Jordan. In her call for serious action for peace in the Middle East, the Secretary-General of the Middle East Council of
Churches said, “We join the voice of Pope Francis and his words in the meeting of Barry in their dignity to all those closest to the heart of Jesus.”

Saint Egidio International Conference “Bridges of Peace” - Bologna, Italy
Dr Souraya Bechealany represented the MECC at the “Bridges of Peace” Bologna, Italy. She talked about the importance of fighting for the weak and the oppressed who are in turn suffering from the abuse of power, under a panel called “Christians in the Middle East”. In her call for serious action for peace in the Middle East, the Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches said: “We join the voice of Pope Francis and his words in the meeting of Barry in their dignity to all those closest to the heart of Jesus”.

Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies in Abu Dhabi
Dr. Souraya Bechealany, representing MECC, took part in the 15th of November forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim societies in Abu Dhabi, where more than 50 Muslim and Christian leader from 11 countries, were present. Hosted by Wilton Park, an Executive Agency of the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office and by the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, and in partnership with the Rashad Centre for Cultural Governance of Adyan Foundation, based in Lebanon, the conference aimed to develop a common interfaith understanding and definition of inclusive citizenship in the Middle East.

“Maison du Futur” Conference entitled “Do Christians Have a Future in the Middle East?”
On November 16, MECC met with Lebanese political parties, international representatives and religious figures at USEK university in Lebanon, where members from the multinational ROACO were also present. Issues regarding the displacement of refugees and their implications was the theme of the meeting.

ROACO meeting in Lebanon 16 November 2018
On November 16, MECC met with Lebanese political parties, international representatives and religious figures at USEK university in Lebanon, where members from the multinational ROACO were also present. Issues regarding the displacement of refugees and their implications was the theme of the meeting.

Regional Conference on the Message and Role of Caritas, Lebanon, February 2019
The Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany and the Regional Representative of ACT Middle East and North Africa Mr. Gordon Simango participated in the Regional Conference on the Message and Role of Caritas, held at the Saydet el jabal Monastery, Lebanon. Dr Bechealany emphasized on the MECC ecumenical role in the act of love and relief and on the ways of cooperation between the churches for the good and human dignity.

MECC participated in the International Conference for Human Fraternity - Abu Dhabi, February 2019
The Middle East Council of Churches was represented by its Secretary General Dr Souraya Bechealany at the International Conference for Human Fraternity in Abu Dhabi. In her intervention “Human Fraternity Challenges and Opportunities” Dr. Bechealany considered that this spiritual conference that opened Heaven’s door to look down at the concerns of our Arab World, which had been torn apart for decades by conflicts and wars in the name of religion”. Dr. Bechealany concluded: “MECC hopes that this conference will bring the fruits of the Spirit, so that fraternal love and Peace may find their way to the Middle East”.

Visits

Official Visit to Church Leaders in Syria, November 2019 11-9
“Without the gathering of the Eastern Churches and agreeing on clear grounds to unite efforts in the face of the challenges that threaten the Christians of the East, Christians of all sects or those who remain steadfast in this East, are facing a real existential danger”. With this conclusion, The MECC Secretary General Dr Souraya Bechealany...
ended her meetings with the Church Leaders in Syria, where she visited His Beatitude Yousef al Absi, Greek Melkite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, His Beatitude John X Yaziji, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church. Her visit also concluded His Eminence Cardinal Mario Zenari, Apostolic Nuncio to Syria and Right Reverend Peter Zaour, President of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria.

As her first visit, she convened with His Beatitude Patriarch Ibrahim Ishaq the Patriarch of Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. The second destination was in Cairo to visit His Beatitude Theodore II, Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa. The day after, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II received the MECC delegation at the papal headquarters in the Cathedral of St. Mark in Abbassia, Cairo and emphasized that The Coptic Church, which lives the renewed spirit of resurrection throughout the year, supports and respects the Ecumenical role of the Council since its establishment. His Beatitude later continued to inform the Secretary General of the appointment of His Eminence Bishop Thomas as the Council’s new representative of the Coptic Orthodox Church instead of the late His Holiness Bishop Bishoy.

Under the title “Give us to bear, fruit of the Holy Spirit” and in context with MECC’s visit to the Church leaders of the Middle East, the General Secretary Dr. Souraya Bechealany underwent a series of visitations to Egyptian Church leaders from the 15th to 18th of December.

MECC Visits the Orthodox Archbishop, the Maronite Bishop, and the Theological Institute in Cyprus 22nd of February 2019
In the context of her visits to the Leaders of the Members Churches in The Middle East Council of Churches, MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany, together with Associate Secretary General Michael Spirou, MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department Fr. Gaby Hachem, and Policies and Communication Advisor Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, visited His Beatitude Chrysostomos II, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus. Furthermore, Dr Bechealany met His Eminence Youssef Soueif, the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus. The visit to Cyprus also included a stop at the Theological Institute of the Church of Cyprus, and an agreement to further coordination and scholarly collaboration with MECC.

Iraq visit
MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany completed her protocol visits to Church leaders by meeting His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Louis Raphael Sako Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans, later she participated in the meeting of the Catholic Patriarchs of the East in Baghdad, Iraq. Dr Bechealany concluded her tour with a protocol visit to the presidential palace to meet Iraqi President Barham Salih.

Lebanon visits
The visits of MECC the Secretary General in Lebanon included His Eminence Cardinal Mor Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi, His Holiness Aram I, His Beatitude Mor Ignatius Youssef IV Younan, as well as His Beatitude Gregoire Pierre XX Ghabroyan and Rev. Dr. Habib Badr.
Throughout 2018, the tragedies of displaced people did not change in countries that have suffered some of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time, classified as the largest and most severe after World War II.

When we consider the millions of internally displaced people in Syria and Iraq, still needing humanitarian support on all levels, or the displaced Syrians and Iraqis in neighboring countries, we realize the huge scale of human and psychological distress and its negative impact on future generations, including children, youth, women, people with special needs, injured victims of violence and war, and elderly people who dream of a safe retirement. We cannot forget the effect of these crises on host societies, which are already facing economic and social challenges, and the consequences of extending crises on their potential and infrastructure.

Facing this critical situation, the Middle East Council of Churches had no choice but to pursue its relief and humanitarian programs set since the Council’s establishment in 1974, during the outbreak of the war in Lebanon and the subsequent wars in the Gulf and Iraq. These programs had been preceded by the Palestine Refugee Support Program that still constitutes a special department established for this cause.

The activities of the Ecumenical Relief Department during the year in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan focused on ensuring the dignity of the beneficiaries, regardless of their background, and leaving a positive impact from the various programs.

The 2018 programs also covered many activities that sought to meet the actual needs of the beneficiaries, based on a field survey conducted by the program team. Numerous relief services provided food, clothing, household and health items, financial assistance and others. Education programs also included support for school fees and for the rehabilitation of health departments in war-affected schools. The education programs for children who dropped school to end in Lebanese and Jordanian camps supported preparatory and secondary education students in some of the science subjects.

In health programs, MECC continued its services at the Our Lady Dispensary in Mount Lebanon. The programs included distributing medicine and vaccines, providing medical consultations and health awareness programs for women in Syria and Lebanon, and assisting children, women and youth patients with cancer in Syria and Lebanon by covering medicines of high cost or periodic medical analyses.
### Number of Target Groups in the Ecumenical Relief Program in 2018 by Country & Program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>JORDAN</th>
<th>LEBANON</th>
<th>SYRIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education for out of school program</td>
<td>511 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition fee support and remedial classes</td>
<td></td>
<td>1600 students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct cash assistance</td>
<td>5000 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS programs for women</td>
<td>1920 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livelihood programs</td>
<td>525 beneficiaries</td>
<td>790 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>790 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of business skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>490 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery of broken business during the war</td>
<td></td>
<td>87 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health awareness programs for women</td>
<td>450 women</td>
<td>339 women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment support for cancer patients</td>
<td></td>
<td>110 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinic and health counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td>1611 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of NFI's (winterizations, blankets, family hygiene kits and school kits)</td>
<td>350 family</td>
<td>32171 unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of food kits</td>
<td>350 family</td>
<td>1073 unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs of Cash for Work</td>
<td></td>
<td>440 beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of garbage bins</td>
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<td></td>
<td>140 bins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School rehabilitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health promotion for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>753 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of indirect beneficiaries</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>14967</td>
<td>27249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We dream of continuing to work with the talents that were given and will be given to us.

We dream of targeting the largest segment possible of beneficiaries in the future.

We dream of creative ideas and programs that meet the actual needs of beneficiaries.

We dream of strong cooperation between the Middle East Council of Churches and its member churches to awaken the ecumenical spirit, the spirit of communion and cooperation among all.

We dream that no one be forgotten nor abandoned, and that we will not lose generations of children.

We dream that security and safety return to this East tormented since decades.

We dream that all our work conforms to Christ’s desire, as an offering of love and sacrifice. May we be candles that melt to light the darkness of those whom God has enabled us to their service.

Samer Laham – Regional Director
Ecumenical Relief Services Department