

# AL - MUNTADA

The Middle East Council of Churches

September – October 2019



## Pope Francis to the MECC: Pray for me...!



**Cardinal Louis Rafael Saco**

The Church is a mother and a teacher who loves and serves everybody just like its Founder



**Dr. Tarek Mitri**

Identity protection is gaining supremacy over human partnership... alas!



## The Diakonia, the Church at the service of the humanitarian

## LETTER OF THE PRESIDENT

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### **The Church is a mother and a teacher who loves and serves everybody just like its Founder**

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The Church is a community gathered around its founder Jesus Christ, proclaiming the gospel, praying and placing itself at the service of love. The Church has the duty of employing its full potentials and experiences to take people under its wings, to serve and enrich them. The letter to Romans says: "He who has the gift of ministry, let him serve" (Romans 12: 5). The sons of the Church, namely the clergy and the lay faithful, identify themselves with the Christ, the role model and the source of salvation. They chose Him out of love, the kind of love that is stronger than anything else, to serve Him and serve the least of His brothers (Matthew: chapter 25).

Following the Christ is a free and deliberate response to His invitation to walk in His footsteps faithfully and joyfully, adhere to Him, accompany Him, read His words and contemplate them. These steps deepen our knowledge of Him, consolidate our love for Him, and strengthen communion

among us. Our relationship shall then radiate so we rush and commit to ministering others (Acts of the Apostles 20:35, Matthew 25). I stress the importance of prayer and the relationship with Christ as a starting point for our relationship with the others. Our deep and free spiritual attitude should stem from the celebration of the Eucharist in its universal relational dimension. As Pope Francis said in the General Audience of 19 June 2019, "Without prayer no one can be a disciple of Jesus; without prayer we cannot be Christians! It is the air we breathe".

Since the founding of the Church, the apostles have crystallized the forms of ministry by giving them a theological dimension. They were creative improving them before discovering that ministry was closer to a "divine vocation" that required sacrifice and listening to the Holy Spirit. They called it the talents (or charisma in Greek). They founded diakonia for the service of love: " So the

## LETTER OF THE PRESIDENT

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Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6: 2-6). The letter to Romans mentions 18 men and 5 women who worked with Paul in spreading the Gospel, namely, "Our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae" that Paul asked the faithful to help. Throughout its long history, the Church has read events from a faith perspective, and has made tre-

mendous efforts to minister people and meet their diverse needs. It was the first to open schools, hospitals, orphanages and homes for the elderly. I cannot but recall the role of male and female religious orders in absorbing poverty and illness, ignorance/ illiteracy, providing care for people with special needs, visiting prisons, or establishing nursing homes. Amidst tremendous and disturbing challenges such as wars, injustice, displacement, unemployment and poverty, the need for an effective ecclesiastical presence and a careful reading of the signs of the times seem urgent. The Church is invited to pause and contemplate into the current events, especially in the Middle East, to analyze what is happening and seek with the people of good will to find sound and lasting solutions. As a matter of fact, the Church must optimize its capacities to alleviate the burden of the people, raise their spirits, promote their hope for a better future and use its endowments to serve them as

much as possible.

It goes without saying that the Church is not merely an institutional and legal body, but above all, the mystery of the presence of God and the Christ who is omnipresent and active amidst people; a church that develops relationships, participation and communion with a sense of responsibility, commitment and constancy despite differences and difficulties; a church that mobilizes goodness which is inherent to every human being; a church that encourages positive and voluntary initiatives. In this regard, some theological and practical suggestions can be made as follows:

### 1. Theological:

a. In general, cooperation with Muslim and other religious authorities is suggested as a means to formulating a common "societal jurisprudence" or what is called by Christians the theology of political and social reconciliation. Such theology finds its origins in tolerant and open religious principles, in human fraternity and national ties to create a new driving spirit for political and societal action by building a state of citizenship, law, justice and equality. An example from Latin America is the liberation theology of the 1960s. A theology that emerged to raise the awareness of people on their dignity when powerful countries confiscated their freedom or looted their "oil and agriculture" resources. This theology developed gradually and succeeded in achieving several reforms, especially in promoting human dignity and building a harmonious society.

b. Christians are invited to constantly advocate the theology of the land, to remain attached to their land especially in the East, their original land which marked their history, their civilization and culture. A campaign should be organized there for the theology of hope and the joy of return (Nehemiah 12: 31-43), as was the case of the Christians of Mosul and the towns of the Nineveh plain in Iraq, during the displacement and in the process of reconstruction and return.

### 2. Practical

- a. To train people on life and ethical values, respect for diversity and coexistence through mixed workshops.
- b. To establish centers for the upbringing of children, building their character and preparing a responsible generation.
- c. To put in place centers for empowering women culturally and economically and provide them with skills to raise their standard of living and build family and community awareness.

In conclusion, Christians were never expatriates in the East, but rather the people of the land and the builders of its civilization. They are invited today to communicate courageously with their Muslim brothers by carrying the torch of love, tolerance, freedom and dignity, as stated in the document "Human Fraternity" signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Al - Azhar Dr. Ahmed al-Tayeb. ■

**Cardinal Louis Rafael Saco**  
**Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon**



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## FOREWORD BY THE MECC SECRETARY GENERAL

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### Human Fraternity and Diakonia

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The second Issue of Al Muntada magazine, in its new look, is addressing “Diakonia”, another no less important topic than the “human fraternity”, while asking the following: “How can fraternity carry any meaning unless translated into Diakonia, i.e. service with love?”.

Didn't the Lord Jesus command us to do this in His remembrance until His second coming? How can we remember the Christ without recalling the feast of love in the last supper, expressed in the Gospel of John by washing the disciples' feet? Whoever wants the communion of love with Jesus Christ must first kneel down and wash their brothers' feet. Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb remind us in the Abu Dhabi historic document that those who share human fraternity are seen as brothers.

Diakonia, or the service of love, is our communion with the kingship of the Christ, through which we

express our discipleship to Jesus as we listen to His commandment: If anyone wants to be first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all (Mark 9:35).

The Church loses its *raison d'être* when forced to abandon its ecumenical mission, and when it neglects the commandment of bowing to those little ones for whom the Lord Jesus sent it.

The Middle East Council of Churches loses its *raison d'être* unless it converts the words of love, unity and service into actions and truth. This service means accompanying the displaced and refugees, healing the bleeding wounds, releasing the oppressed, and working diligently to preserve the human dignity and freedom, here and everywhere, in honor of God and as a testimony for human fraternity. ■

**MECC Secretary General**

Dr Souaraya Bechealany

## FEATURE FILE

### THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE HUMANITARIAN

#### The Church is Fearless

##### Huguette Salameh

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT CONFLICTS, WARS, INTOLERANCE AND HATRED ... TEAR APART ALL MANKIND, WITHOUT EXCEPTION. EVERYONE IS EITHER SUFFERING OR WATCHING INJUSTICE, DISCRIMINATION, DISPLACEMENT, IMPOVERISHMENT, MARGINALIZATION, AND TRAFFICKING IN PEOPLE AND THEIR PAIN TO DEATH. WHAT ARE ALL OF US DOING ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF FORCED IMMIGRANTS WHO DREAM OF A DIGNIFIED LIFE, OR ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF REFUGEES LOOKING FOR A SAFE TENT WHERE NOBODY IS MONITORING THEM. WHAT DOES THE CHURCH DO ABOUT THIS DARKNESS? AND HOW DOES IT INTERACT WITH THE ISSUES AND TRAGEDIES OF OUR SAD WORLD?

In his message on the occasion of the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2019, Pope Francis spoke about the "globalization of indifference", xenophobia and the culture of marginalization. He said that "the signs of meanness we see around us heighten our fear of the other, the unknown, the marginalized, the foreigner... This is particularly what we are seeing today with migrants and refu-



gees knocking on our doors in search of protection, security and a better future".

Pope Francis said: "The Church which 'goes forth'... can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast". (Evangellii Gaudium, 24).

Yes, the church takes the initiative, how else would we understand the Parable of the Good Samaritan?! And that the First shall be the servant of all?! In the Christian theology, the Church is at the service of humans through Diakonia, which is "serving



human" and preserving dignity. The Diakonia and the MECC have an existential relationship, a process that began since the establishment of MECC in the 1970s. Serving humankind is a priority goal for the Council and the heartbeat of partnership with and among member churches, international partners and Western churches.

Committed to upholding human dignity, the MECC has and continues to reach and provide millions of victims and affected people with all means of support, during the conflicts and wars that the Middle East has gone through, breaking the barrier of fear

and isolation, and engaging in an open confrontation with the culture of indifference, exclusion and individualism.

In this issue, we highlight the spirit of service, communion and love of the other, while providing actual figures on the magnitude of the tragedy of migrants, refugees and displaced people. We also ask the following: When do we remember that the other is my neighbor?! It is when we admit that the problem does not lie in the behavior of migrants or in the consequences of their presence, but rather in the lack of love!



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## **We are called together to tackle the causes of asylum and migration**

### **Let us first serve the dignity of humans**

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#### **Samer Laham**

Regional Director of Diakonia Department and the regional Relief Program

On June 20, the world celebrates the World Refugee Day, where the UN, along with international, local and religious humanitarian organizations, actively work to express their solidarity with the suffering of refugees all around the world, regardless of the reason, be it war, disasters or persecution. This solidarity is part of the advocacy campaigns aiming at addressing the root causes of this situation and collecting financial donations from governments, institutions and individuals, to help humanitarian institutions sustain their services to refugees worldwide.

People are used to hear speeches calling for supporting refugees and protecting their rights wherever they are. The speeches also call on host governments to provide the necessary support, as if the responsibility of the refugees was exclusive to them, as well as countries facing internal displacement issues resulting from the crises that have befallen them.

Despite all this, we don't see any radical solutions to the root causes of forced migration, nor do we observe serious attempts to defuse wars that destroy everyone and everything in its path, and which led to an increase in the number of refugees and displaced people to nearly 70 million

worldwide, including some 5 million Palestinians and 4 million Syrians. This is without counting the number of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons as a result of the Iraqi crisis at the end of the last century.

Asylum and displacement are no longer a humanitarian or political issue, but a moral and spiritual one as well. This is the rationale behind the calls of faith-based organizations, including the Middle East Council of Churches. Since the founding of MECC in 1974, the social service programs (Diakonia) have been the pillars of the Council's work and its mission to establishing the rules of dialogue and building peace in communities in which it operates.

The Diakonia includes programs to serve Palestinian refugees and those affected by the civil war in Lebanon which lasted for years, followed by the Gulf War and lately the war in Iraq and Syria. The MECC's ecumenical relief or development programs were not part of their strategic plans as simple activities, but a living expression of the concept of practical (not intellectual) solidarity, with all marginalized, excluded, displaced, refugees and people face with all forms of violence. It also seeks, by all available means, to relieving the

pain of those affected, and restoring the human dignity which is a gift from God. In addition, the programs aim to help them regain their livelihoods with dignity, and face the new circumstances with confidence and faith.

Accordingly, the Council adopted the following slogan:

First, to serve with dignity, because dignity is the first thing a person loses when exposed to any kind of crisis. It's a gift from God to the human whom he created in his own image and likeness. Second, to serve with love, humility and dedication, thereby the person in need can feel that we are serving them from the bottom of our hearts, not out of duty or compassion. Suffering people need to feel that they are human beings whose dignity, privacy and uniqueness are respected. Therefore, one of the foundations of MECC's programs is meeting the desires and needs of humans who are the reflection of the

suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus Christ, who was born in a manger because he was homeless and who became a refugee after fleeing from his homeland in Egypt, spread his absolute love, sympathy and fatherhood. His service to humans culminated with the glory of his death, crucified, naked, humiliated and lonely after his disciples left him.

This living example is the compass that guides MECC staff and its programs. The goal is not to increase funding, expansion or gain sympathy and publicity through the media, but to leave a positive impact on the hearts of those who we serve.

We learn in MECC that whoever wants to be the first, should be a servant of all, and we set Jesus Christ as our example at all times. Achieving this goal is not a given because human weakness always pulls us down, but we always strive to keep it in mind in every daily prayer and in every training targeting our team.



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MECC has succeeded and is still trying to shed light on hidden facts that the world media shy away from, because the truth liberates the world and “You Will Know the Truth and the Truth Will Set You Free” as Jesus said. To achieve its goal, the Council uses all private and friendly media platforms, and gets involved in international discussions, debates, forums and conferences to raise the voice and spread the message. Today, the Council, as the sole and official representative of all the Churches of the Middle East, brings together 28 independent Churches belonging to the four ecclesiastical families: Oriental and Greek Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical. Churches are placing the MECC before its duties and responsibilities due to its unique character and constant attempts towards the unity of churches, interreligious dialogue, advocacy for peace and safe coexistence based

on respecting others, regardless of their religious, ethnic or cultural background.

On September 29 of this year, His Holiness Pope Francis celebrated the World Day of Migrants & Refugees which was endorsed by the Vatican as a day for Catholic Churches across the world, including Catholic Relief and Developmental Institutions.

On the occasion, His Holiness launched a new appeal calling for peace, ending wars and showing solidarity with those in need, namely the refugees, the displaced, the vulnerable, the prisoners, the abducted and others.

From this day on, we expect a paradigm shift in the global approach to contemporary issues, including climate change, drought, desertification and famines that are increasing day by day.

From this day on, we expect from decision makers to listen more and seriously address the issues at



hand. The world is tired of the rhetoric of empathy and solidarity in the absence of significant and radical solutions ...

From this day on, we expect further and better solidarity between international and local Christian institutions, especially with the MECC, a unique ecumenical entity for joint work and constructive coordination. This should have common efforts translated into sustainable and positive impact on the affected people rather than further competition and conflict of interests.

From this day on, we expect the world and decision makers to listen to the voice of the Lord calling for devotion in love and peace. Fasting, praying and lighting candles are needed for us to be heard by God, from whom we seek every day to bless the world with a whiff of His soul and His peace. On this day, we expect the Churches to be

attentive to their parishioners, to their economic, psychological and spiritual sufferings, and to put all their educational, medical and economic institutions at the service of the poor; “Freely you have received; freely give” ...

From this day on, we expect more voices of truth and conscience against injustice, oppression and slavery in its various economic, social and moral forms..

The Council associates itself with His Holiness Pope Francis and the heads of Churches in the Middle East whose voices intersect with the voice of His Holiness calling us to witness something new, something that renews us from the inside, to be conveyed to the whole world and to those we serve, “Behold, I am making all things new”; Isn’t it that God made us candles that melt and light the way to serve others. ■





## FEATURE FILE

### THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE HUMANITARIAN

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#### “Who is our neighbor?”

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##### **Dr. Peter Makari**

Executive, Middle East and Europe

Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ  
and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



Walking the streets of Beirut, one cannot help but notice the presence of Syrians, forcibly displaced from their homes and country in the past eight years due to violence and instability there. The Middle East region as a whole has witnessed a disproportionate share of forced migration in the past century, largely because of wars and violent conflict. Since 1915 at least, Armenians, Palestinians, Iraqis, and now Syrians, are among those who have been forced to flee and to resettle elsewhere, to seek some security and to try to reestablish a life of dignity and hope.

Migration, displacement, and exile are permanent realities in human history, and the Biblical texts are replete with stories of people, families, and communities that have been forced from their place of residence, including Jesus and the

Holy Family. The theologian and scholar of world Christianity, Jehu Hanciles, has said that if you remove migration stories from the Bible, there wouldn't be much left.

Today, according to the United Nations, more than 70 million people have been forcibly displaced; the largest number in recorded history. Causes include war, violence, persecution, climate change, drought and famine, impoverishment, exploitation, and the legacies of colonialism. There are many broken places in the world; the US is neither exempt nor faultless. Countries like Syria and Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, are ravaged by war; generations of Palestinian refugees are denied their right of return; island nations like Tuvalu are losing land to the rising ocean; Latin American countries face high levels of structural,

social, and economic violence; and Southern Asians are trafficked into slavery. All people share a preference to remain safe and secure in their homes and communities, if that were an option. For victims of these circumstances, it most often is not.

But the human element of forced migration is felt less in the so-called “global North” than in so many places elsewhere in the world. Each global region, and many of our United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) global partners, including the MECC, face this reality daily, whether by experiencing the influx of people who have been forced from their homes or countries, responding to their needs, or advocating for policies to improve the ways that the nations of the world address the issue. The UCC and Disciples have been actively involved in supporting humanitarian response and advocacy in each of the major instances of displacement of the past century named earlier. Even so, we must ask why people are fleeing home; how temporary is their condition as they wonder what their future will hold; what are their real options, what is our responsibility toward them, and what can we do?

This past summer, the UCC and Disciples, in their General Synod and Assembly, respectively, addressed the issue of global forced migration by affirming a vision of God’s family that is inclusive, accepting, and welcoming; and

committed to support global partners’ responses to the needs of displaced people; to advocate for the rights of refugees as well as on issues of economic, climate, and immigration justice; to work to dismantle racism, to learn about different cultures and religions, and to counter all forms of racism, discrimination, bigotry, and xenophobia; and to call upon our government to implement international agreements on refugees and migration.

Walls, exclusion, and paying off other countries to contain forcibly displaced people are not viable solutions. As a church, we have a different understanding of how we ought to care for each other as human beings, and we must make our voice heard to hold countries, including our own, to higher standards of policy and practice.

More responsible, comprehensive, and collective responses to global forced migration are urgent, and available. As churches, we are called ask, “how can we work together to welcome our neighbor?” ■

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### THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE HUMANITARIAN

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Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon

**MIREILLE GIRARD:**

**Integrating Syrian refugees in Lebanon is not an option and 80% desire to return**

*Interviewed by Huguetta Salameh*



THE WORLD RECOGNIZES THAT IT IS NO LONGER ABLE TO IGNORE THE PHENOMENON OF THE HUMAN WAVE AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE STORMS OF ASYLUM AND DISPLACEMENT THAT HIT BOTH EAST AND WEST. BUT HOW CAN THIS WORLD SHARE RESPONSIBILITY AND SEEK SOLUTIONS FOR THE 25 MILLION REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLE WHO SEEK SAFETY AND SECURITY? A QUESTION ANSWERED ON DECEMBER 17, 2018, WHEN THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTED THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES: HAS THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO REFUGEE SITUATIONS, PARTICULARLY REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS FROM SYRIA, REALLY IMPROVED AFTER THIS DATE, ALMOST NINE YEARS AFTER THE BEGINNING OF THEIR TRAGEDY? AND HOW?

On this and other questions, the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon, Mireille Gerard, explained that the Global Compact on Refugees represents a strong expression of multilateralism in today's world. And the role host countries play in the international system to protect refugees is - through the Compact - finally gaining the recognition it deserves. These hosts are really the biggest donors to the international refugee response. By hosting refugees and providing them with protection, these countries make huge contributions to the lives of refugees, and to regional and global stability and peace and security – overall, to global good. The Compact translates the idea of responsibility sharing into practical, concrete measures. It guides refugee responses to ensure that host



countries get the timely support they need and that robust support is sustained throughout the duration of a crisis. The compact also pursues a better coverage of refugees, during their time in exile, by public services such as schools, health care facilities and social care. It emphasizes the importance of enabling the refugees to make both ends meet, develop their human capital and lead dignified lives. Very importantly, the compact stresses that solutions to the plight of refugees need to be sought from the start.

UNHCR together with other humanitarian actors and donor partners, remain definitely committed to supporting Lebanon and the Syrian refugees that have fled to Lebanon, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

Given the multiple devastating crises that are

ongoing, and the fact that there are 25 million people living as refugees around the world, including 6.7 million refugees from Syria only, the support that humanitarian partners are receiving from the donor community is critical for us to be able to collectively keep on supporting Lebanon and the refugees it is hosting.

- Through your role as the representative of the UNHCR in Lebanon, you always emphasize your efforts in the context of the safe return of displaced people to Syria, don't you think that the decline of military operations in Syria and talk that about 80% of the Syrian areas are now safe, are enough to achieve a full and comprehensive return? How do you face accusations of obstruction of return?

And how are you keen to achieve conditions that meet the priorities of refugees and dis-



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placed persons and address the mechanisms of their legal return along with reconstruction and sustainable development?

UNHCR is actively working towards a successful and sustainable return of Syrian refugees to their country. As in any mass displacement, we knew early on that return would be the preferred option for the refugees, and have been working towards this end as part of our mandate. UNHCR is in no circumstances obstructing return. Our role is to respect refugees'

decision, not to decide on their behalf. The refugees know better for themselves.

In our almost 70 years of global operational engagement in responding to massive refugee crises, UNHCR has helped more than 40 million refugees who wished to return to their country to repatriate. In doing so, we have always engaged with all actors including governments of countries of origin, host countries, regional and global actors. In the Syrian crisis context, UNHCR is continuing its engagement with the

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WE HAVE INVESTED AROUND \$ 230 MILLION  
IN LEBANESE INSTITUTIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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Government of Syria, and all other stakeholders working on return to help build trust and consensus around approaches to return.

To enable the majority of refugees to return, it is important to work on the aspects, legal or just practical, that are important for refugees, and will make them feel confident to return. This is what UNHCR is doing by working with all concerned. Working together increases the chances for returns to be sustainable in the long term, and limits the possibility of further displacement.

- To what extent can we say that the passage of time since the crisis of displacement and asylum in Syria has entered the circle of risk of normalization and dilution? How do you deal with the policy of confronting the integration of

refugees in the host countries to get them to return as they become increasingly exhausted every day and the level of poverty between them continues to reach about 70%?

There is a perception that aid is keeping the refugees in Lebanon. Far from this, the levels of vulnerabilities of refugees remain very concerning. People are barely staying afloat. The Lebanese authorities have emphasized that the integration of refugees in Lebanon is not an option; everyone understands this. At the same time, well over 80% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon have expressed their wish to return to their country ultimately. It is their preference. Some are deciding to return now. Others need more time. For those who have already decided

to return, we help in a variety of ways, including providing them with information or assisting them in obtaining key documents they may be missing, e.g. birth, marriage, death certificates, or school records, all of which help the refugee re-establish themselves back home, and access services like hospitals and schools in Syria. Once refugees have returned, our teams in Syria also try to visit them as soon as possible to assess their needs there and provide support. However, access remains limited. Meanwhile, in host countries, it is important refugees continue to be cared for, in all their dignity. A recent World Bank report has also demonstrated that the education and skills that refugees receive in exile equips them for a more successful return. This is an important investment in the future.

- How will support continue to host countries,

especially those suffering from the repercussions of scarcity of resources and the exhaustion of all economic and social capabilities such as Lebanon, Jordan and even Cyprus?

And what has become of the mechanisms for the implementation of the LCRP?

UNHCR is conscious of the impact of hosting so many refugees on a small country like Lebanon. Over the years, Lebanon and the Lebanese have shown immense solidarity to refugees living here.

We are continuously working to reduce the strain on Lebanese host communities and institutions, and support their efforts to respond to the needs of the large refugee population together with the needs of Lebanese families. UNHCR has over the past years allocated substantial resources from its humanitarian budget to supporting Lebanese institutions and pro-



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jects that benefit local communities as well as refugees. Since 2011, we have invested close to USD 230 million in Lebanon's institutions and infrastructure to support a number of ministries in delivering public services to a larger population and to fund projects that bring needed infrastructure and equipment to Lebanese communities in order to mitigate the impact of the refugees' presence. These infrastructure

Lebanon, and advocating with donor countries and development partners to provide sustained support to Lebanese communities and institutions. There has been no reduction in aid overall in recent years.

We are currently planning the LCRP response for 2020. More than 180 government, UN agencies and NGO partners are pulling their expertise and experience together to address the

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MORE THAN 180 GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, UN AGENCIES AND PARTNER NGOS JOIN HANDS TO PERCEIVE THE NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE NEXT YEAR

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and equipment will continue to benefit the Lebanese communities well after the refugees' return to their country. Simultaneously, we continue highlighting the immense needs in

needs of the most vulnerable in the year ahead, while supporting and reinforcing the Lebanese institutions. Solidarity is very much in the order of the day. ■



Pictures: Archive UNHCR

## Humanity, Sovereignty and Diplomacy in the heart of the Theology of the Other

### Ziad El-Sayegh

MECC Policies and Communication Advisor



Middle East Churches are generally playing a key role in providing support to refugees and IDPs through cross-cutting social, medical and educational interventions by ecclesiastical institutions and in a participatory approach with all the partners in Human dignity responsibility. Civil society organizations are also mobilized to help refugees and displaced. While churches and their executive institutional bodies are undertaking a considerable work, it is worth examining the refugees and IDPs situation from a theological and diakonia perspective.

The theological perspective consists in reproducing the "Theology of the Other", knowing that Jesus Christ never made a difference between a human being and another. His choice of apostles was never motivated by a desire of distinguishing them from others, his aim was to attract a wide range of competent persons on the basis of equality.

Twelve apostles Christianised the world. Not a single moment did they feel they were a minority. In no way did they care to hide behind someone. Jesus, when choosing his first apostles, refuted two logics:

- a) The segregation of communities between minority and majority. In other words, human beings are equal before God;
- b) Looking for protection by a strong body or institution. In other words, only the equality of human beings, based on the superiority of the spirit of the law and the value system, is capable of protecting the rights of individuals and safeguarding communities and societies.

Turning back to fundamental equality before the law in order to preserve human dignity, as human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, paves the way to fighting xenophobia, racism, populism and national racism. This return requires from our Churches and our brothers and sisters



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### THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE HUMANITARIAN

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from other religions to share the responsibility of taking up theological, educational, socio-economic, political or media related challenges, while prioritizing values.

In view of the need for return to equality before the law, which is fundamental to preserving human dignity, as human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, we must address the refugees and IDPs crisis and the resulting confrontational processes by figuring out that there is a need of understanding the dramatic shift in the reproduction of an intimidating speech against the different others, very often for the sake of taking power. Some individuals and some communities are supportive of those intimidating speeches for cultural, national, or socio-economic reasons. They are circumventing their own religious affiliations which inevitably carry an invitation to respect the other and consecrate the right to difference.

In any case, to address the refugee and displacement crises in the Middle East and the Arab region on the one hand, namely the occupied Palestine, the wounded Iraq, and the bleeding Syria - crises which resulted in catastrophic humanitarian burdens and existential repercussions on host countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey – and in Europe on the other hand, one should ask whether the humanitarian relief to refugees and displaced persons or even development interventions in host communities are sufficient to avoid the escalation of xenophobia, national racism, and populism? In other words,

is it the lack of resources which leads us to the tragedy of the commons and produces a crisis of identities where religion is a founding element? Or is it rather the mismanagement of pluralism and diversity protection based on equality before the law that contributes to the rising of the above-mentioned shock waves?

Communities and societies are disintegrating as a result of injustice, war and terrorism, which are provoking waves of refugees and displaced, therefore, wouldn't be appropriate to address the causes of disintegration in parallel with its consequences? Religious authorities who defend the fundamental value of human beings who were created in the image and likeness of God on the one hand and who seek to achieving community peace along with a pure memory abiding by the principle of pluralism and recognition of the right to difference and respect on the other hand, are invited to influence the process of revisiting the concept of the "Other", every "Other" in the public sphere, a concept intimately related to the promotion of human rights, freedoms, democracy and social justice. Addressing the rise of xenophobia, racism, populism, and nationalism could only happen by reproducing the "theology of the other" at the heart of "political theology", otherwise only the equation of fear mobilization, exacerbation of extremism, and attraction of people's votes will prevail. This is destructive and the consequences will be perceived for years to come unless an ecumenical and a participatory diakonia initiative is taken.

Regarding the institutional diakonia perspective, it is recommended to build an ecclesiastical coordinated strategy to activate humanitarian intervention and avoid duplication while rationalizing the contribution patterns for the sake of achieving balance between relief and investment in peace, reconciliation and conflict prevention. Structural questions must be raised and answered by our churches as follows:

- Are the mechanisms of ecclesiastical intervention in addressing the crisis of refugees and displaced persons effective enough or there is a lack of human and financial resources?
- In their humanitarian intervention, are the churches following the logic of "majority" and "minority", and are they leaning towards putting an end to national identities in favor of sectarian identities?
- Is the theology of the other the driving force for attracting relief and development funds or is it an existential reaction?
- Can churches play a more active role than reconciliation and peace-building and how?

To address the crisis from its root cause, it is necessary to move from improvisation to planning, from public relations to networking, from outreach to impact, from financing to productive opportunities, and from rhetoric to action. Instead of collapsing, our societies will grow towards protecting their national identity and consequently the ecclesiastical identity.

Refugees and displacement crisis are not only humanitarian by nature but also political, security

and existential. Therefore, their causes must be addressed, not their symptoms.

This requires the following:

- To organise an International Christian conference following two preparatory national and regional summits where the causes of refugee and displacement crises are put on the top of the Churches agenda.
- To prepare for the three conferences by organizing thematic workshops covering namely the ethical and policy aspects of the crisis.
- To monitor ecclesiastical efforts at all levels with the aim to addressing the crisis and to measure the monitoring effectiveness with scientific indicators.
- To establish a coordinating body upon the findings of the monitoring and effectiveness measuring process to achieve strategic planning and make sure that implementation serves the set objectives.
- To establish an ecclesiastical crisis cell aiming to find a political solution to the crisis of refugees, displaced persons and migrants, in the sense of developing public policies to be imposed on decision-makers with soft diplomacy and through the public opinion.
- To develop a communication strategy on the crisis of integration and fragmentation which is the cause of world tensions.
- To switch from traditional rhetoric to action by providing people with the elements of resilience in their land, far from the logic of "minority and protection". ■

## FEATURE FILE

### THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE HUMANITARIAN

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#### **Forced migration or asylum and displacement is the feature of the 21st century Report reveals the extent of the disaster**

Report by: Fouad Kazan / Translated by: Jack Abi Ramia



As a result of armed struggles and conflicts, the beginning of the 21st century was branded as an era of forced migration. Millions of people were forced to leave their homes and belongings, in an attempt to escape the violence and merely rekindle hope for a brighter future. This led to unforeseen socioeconomic ramifications and pressures on host communities; a point which in no ways whatsoever should be blamed on those forced to displace. Before we carry on with our study, it is important to emphasize that forced migrants are divided into several categories. Due to disagreement over the term “Asylum Seekers”, we will only take into consideration two main categories as recognized

by the UNHCR: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Refugees, according to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees are “persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection.”

As for IDPs, they are deemed as persons who have remained within their own country and have not crossed any borders. They remain under the protection of its government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement.

Major obstacles still stand in the way of forced migrants, whose number amounts to 70.8 million, according to the UNHCR. Some can be attributed to forced deportation, poor integration policies, racism, resource-strained host communities, or the rise of neo-conservatism. As such, we will be reviewing the most notable crises that relate to the forced migration plight and what faith-based organizations are doing to quell the ramifications of the predicament.

### **The Syrian Refugee Crisis**

Ever since the war erupted in Syria in 2011, 50% of the Syrian population was displaced. Syrians were forced to emigrate from Syria to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and North African countries. According to the UNHCR, the number of Syrians holding refugee status in these countries amounts to 5.6 million persons.

In Lebanon, more than one million Syrian refugees suffer from drained financial resources as 70% live below the poverty line. Since there are no formal refugee camps, Syrian refugees are scattered across 2100 rural and urban communities or areas. As a result, they share tight spaces in lodgings with several families.

When it comes to Turkey, the country hosts over 3.6 million Syrian refugees. The majority of them live in urban areas, with over 240,000 accommodated in the 22 government-run refugee camps. Syrians in Turkey face lack of access to income-generating opportunities as only 3% of refugees have a legal work permit. As a result, this caused the poor integration of refugees as many

sought to work illegally; a move that in turn caused a rift between the local communities and the refugees. Moreover, Syrian refugees, especially in the year of 2019, suffered from forced deportation and rampant crackdown by the police.

In Jordan, Syrian refugees amount to 655,000 women and children, 80% of which live outside camps. Since their first arrival to the country, many had limited means to cover even their basic needs. As for those who had that option, currently rely on savings or support from host families and are now increasingly in need of help. It is estimated that 93% of Syrians in Jordan live below the poverty line.

As for Iraq, the country hosts more than 228,000 refugees spread across several regions such as Erbil, Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Anbar. Even though the percentage of refugee households claiming to have access to income-generating opportunities is 59%, only 11% of the refugee households reported having access to humanitarian aid whereas 21% have knowledge of legal and justice bodies in Iraq. Meanwhile, Egypt is home to more than 126,000 Syrian refugees who are catered to by the UNHCR. Although the government has executed several policies to safeguard refugees, especially in the health sector, and several INGOs such as the World Food Program have secured impressive donor support to enhance food security, Syrian refugees still face a formidable challenge in the integration process. Just like in all western societies, Syrians face rampant racism and xenophobia from local communities, as often they are blamed for setbacks in the economy. They are also blamed for interfering in the country's politics.



## FEATURE FILE

### THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE HUMANITARIAN

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#### **The Iraqi Humanitarian Crisis**

Despite the return of several Iraqis to their places of origin as a result of the improvement of the security situation, there still exists about 1.8 million IDPs of whom 450,000 are distributed in formal camp locations, and more than 120,000 in informal settlements and collective centers throughout the country. In some areas, living conditions are not considered to be satisfactory, dignified and safe. Although there are attempts by national government and foreign partners to rebuild the infrastructure of the country, it will take the country over a year to complete reconstruction.

Though the overall situation in Iraq tends to show optimistic signs, religious persecution of certain communities still lingers. For instance, Christians, whose number has dwindled from 1.2 million to less than 250,000, still face day-to-day discrimination that is forcing them to leave the country, even though the reign of ISIS is over. Similarly, the Yazidis face a similar problem. During the ISIS's war of terror on Iraq, it has injected a mindset on Iraqis, forcing them to label Yazidis as infidels; a notion that still exists today. Like Christians, they were forced to leave Iraq to settle in foreign countries where thousands still live in camps, fearing a return to their lands.

#### **The Palestinian Refugee Crisis**

The 1948 conflict, which resulted in the abandonment of Palestinian recognized territories, saw the displacement of 750,000 people. Nowadays, the UNRWA has to tend to 1.5 million Palestinians located in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. According to the agency, an

addition of 4 million Palestinians are now eligible to seek its aid.

According to the latest count of the Lebanese government, Lebanon hosts 450,000 Palestinians distributed across 12 recognized refugee camps, which suffer from serious problems, including poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, poor housing conditions and lack of infrastructure. To make matter worse, the Syrian Civil War forced Palestinian refugees to migrate to Lebanon, causing the over-crowdedness of camps.

Regarding Jordan, there are 2 million registered Palestinian refugees. However, only an approximate number of 370,000 live in 10 recognized refugee camps. Due to the Syrian Civil War, tens of thousands of Palestinians poured into the country; the majority of them suffering from severe poverty and living in an unknown legal status. Concerning the Gaza Strip, it has a population of 1.4 million Palestinian refugees, who suffer from the socio-economic implications that resulted from a blockade imposed by Israel. Due to the years of conflict and the destroyed economy, 80% of Palestinian refugees rely on humanitarian aid. As for the West Bank, it is home to 775,000 registered refugees, of whom around 25% live in 19 camps, which are overcrowded and lack space. Overcrowding is also a huge problem in UNRWA's schools.

#### **The South Sudan Refugee Crisis**

The 2013 conflict that caused between 50,000 to 383,000 deaths which resulted in the increase of violence and deteriorating living conditions, led to the fleeing of 2.5 million refugees. It is the largest existing refugee crisis in Africa and the third largest

refugee crisis in the world. The majority of South Sudanese have fled to countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Sudan hosts approximately 850,000 South Sudanese refugees. The majority of them suffer from acute malnutrition above emergency levels across both refugees and the host community. Ethiopia is home to 420,000 South Sudanese refugees, the largest refugee population in the country. Due to competition over scarce resources, land-related disputes, and demographic changes, intra-communal tensions have been rife.

As for Uganda, it currently hosts an estimated 780,000 South Sudanese refugees. While full food rations were restored for those who arrived after June 2015, others no longer receive food as the individual plots of land granted by the Government of Uganda cannot produce enough yield for refugees to become wholly self-sufficient.

In Kenya, the approximate number of refugees is

114,000. When comparing the condition of South Sudanese refugees in the country to others in the rest of Africa, it is obvious that their situation is better. This is due to the endeavors by the government to play an increased role in the delivery of protection services. This made significant achievements in handling reception facilities, conducting registration, and refugee status determination with the aim of strengthening the national refugee management system.

As for the Democratic Republic of Congo, it hosts around 95,000 refugees who reside in deplorable and overcrowded refugee camps. Thousands reside in impoverished host communities along the border where there are immense security challenges. They also face a lack of services and food insecurity. To make matters worse, it is estimated that 105,000 South Sudanese refugees will arrive into the DRC during 2019, due to the violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement in Central Equatorial State and Western Equatorial State. ■



## INTERVIEW

Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI)

**DR. TAREK MITRI:**

**Identity protection is gaining supremacy over human partnership... alas!**

*Interviewed by Huguette Salameh*



HE IS A MEMBER OF THE MECC FAMILY, A STAUNCH ADVOCATE OF ECUMENISM AND OF THE MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE. HE HELD SEVERAL SENIOR POSITIONS AND EARNED A NUMBER OF TITLES RANGING FROM MINISTER, PHD DOCTOR, RESEARCHER, DIRECTOR, SECRETARY GENERAL, ETC. HOWEVER, "TAREK MITRI" REMAINS HIS FAVORITE TITLE. WE CHOSE TO HAVE A CHAT WITH HIM IN THE FRAMEWORK OF AL-MUNTADA SPECIAL ISSUE ON DIAKONIA OR "THE SERVICE" FOR PRESERVING HUMAN DIGNITY AND CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY, ESPECIALLY IN CURRENT TIMES AND THE INCREASING SENSE OF PANIC IF IT

WEREN'T FOR THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE HOPE OF FAITH.

IN THE LIGHT OF FEAR, ANXIETY, RACIST HYSTERIA AND LETHAL IDENTITIES, HOW COULD CHURCHES IN GENERAL AND MECC IN PARTICULAR PRESERVE THE HUMAN DIGNITY WHICH IS TORN BETWEEN A CRISIS OF IDENTITY, PLURALISM AND POPULISM? IN HIS OFFICE LOCATED AT ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT(AUB), A DISCUSSION WAS HELD WITH DR. MITRI AROUND THIS DIALECTIC.

- **Do you agree that the world is currently experiencing a crisis of identity or is it a crisis of managing pluralism, or both?**

It is difficult to generalize, each society has its own specificities. However, I must say, though hastily, that a large number of societies are being dominated by the so-called “identity politics”, either culturally or politically. In other words, collective interest, whether it is based on religion, ethnicity or cultural identity, is now prevailing over ethics. Defending the rights of a community is now more important than the fight for democratic values or equality before the law. For a large group of people, defending one’s identity from external threats is prevailing over human partnership. The sense of fear and aggressiveness rather than ethical behavior towards refugees, has become a worldwide phenomenon, in the name of identity protection. From a universal ecumenical Christian perspective, I believe it is the duty of Christians, upon the teachings of the Bible, to defend and spread values. For me, loving your neighbor is the quintessence of Biblical values. Furthermore, the Sermon on the Mount is the sum of several values revolving around the love of the neighbor. These values, in my opinion, should be the priority for Christians who are getting busy defending an identity that persons who do not share their religion, culture, language or national identity are putting at stake. In the same vein, I would like to quote Pope Francis’s statement on refugees which bears many meanings: “refugees do not pose a danger for us, they are the ones in danger”. In other words, our Christian commitment imposes upon us that we share their suffering. It is not us who suffer from

the refugee crisis. It is the refugees who embark on boats, drown and die in the sea, without a country to go back to. Hence, Pope Francis reminds us of our major testimony of loving our neighbor, before seeking to defending our identity.

### - Religion and reaction

- **To what extent can religious factors contribute to aggravating or mitigating this reality?**

Religion, especially Christianity, is not intended to draw borders between people. Religion is universal, it belongs to all, it has neither masters nor servants. But in real life, religion is drawing borders, and some are interested in drawing borders according to their religious affiliations. They even want to show that Christianity ends where another religion begins, while pinpointing the differences between Christianity and other religions. They are not interested in showing the content of their faith as much as showing their differences.

- **Could the standpoint of Christians be a reaction to boundaries drawn by others? So we wouldn’t be solely blaming Christians.**

This is a general phenomenon which is not exclusive to Christians. Take the example of India. In the latest elections, the Hindu party swept to victory. It is well-known that it advocates a nationalistic Hindu identity which excludes others. The members of the Hindu party consider that every Christian and Muslim lack identity, inciting one another against other religions, particularly against Muslims. Christians are worried about their fate as well due to this rising phenomenon.



## INTERVIEW

### DR. TAREK MITRI

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I referred specifically to this case to confirm that the problem I'm addressing is not exclusive to Christians. In Europe, many secular and even non-religious people are obsessed with identity and seek to differentiate themselves. Their Christianity is not what separates them from others but their secularism. Thus, what we understand from this dilemma is that there are individuals and groups who are busy showing differences, amplifying them and transforming them into a source of division, disagreement and ostracism, rather than a source of wealth, exchange and interaction.

people fear each other, to generalize, to mix up things and build hatred. Hatred is not a spontaneous nor an innate feeling, but there are those who create it and invest in politics.

- **After your long experience in the WCC, the Ecumenical Dialogue and the Christian-Muslim Dialogue, do you think that these initiatives succeeded in preventing or mitigating these crises?**

This is a rather difficult question. The world went through an unexpected change which I depicted

“ THE EFFICIENCY OF DIALOGUE, BE IT ECUMENICAL OR BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS, IS GETTING WEAKER ”

- **What is the role of research centers in developing dialogue maps? Under whose responsibility does this matter fall?**

It's everyone's responsibility. While intellectuals have a bigger responsibility, the common people are sometimes more honest and faithful to their ethics and values. It sadly happens that too much knowledge alienates intellectuals from fundamental values. However, they play a crucial role because they are more equipped to understand and interpret reality, and can build a critical attitude. Intellectuals, I mean real ones, before adhering to popular societal beliefs, need to discuss them first. They distance themselves from such ideas. They have a bigger responsibility in taking critical stands as they have the appropriate tools to do so. They can discern reality as it is. They are able to make

as a wave of invasion or rise of identity politics marked by hostility, hatred and fear towards the different other. This phenomenon existed in all societies beforehand but was never expected to reach that point. During the period I spent on ecumenical work and interfaith dialogue, we were aware of the many challenges ahead of us, notably in the Islamic-Christian dialogue. But we had greater confidence that dialogue, common action and thinking would bring our communities and churches to a better state. We had great hope that the future was going to be brighter. At the time, we had the feeling that we were doing a cumulative work. For example, the churches were far apart and alienated from each other, the different religions were in alienation and even a state of mutual hostility. There is a long history of

alienation between some, and hostility among others. We wanted to change this reality even though we knew it would take time, but we had the feeling that something was being cumulated and we were gradually building up and establishing a new situation and new relationships. That was the feeling that drove our commitment.

In my opinion, the future is blurred. Our confidence in a better future has weakened. We are no longer certain that the seeds we sowed will bear fruits. I am afraid that all the efforts we made were fruitless and going backwards is the dominant attitude. Paradoxically, NGOs and institutions calling for dialogue are growing while the impact of dialogue is weakening and decreasing.

This could be due to the great social and cultural changes that the world has witnessed, or it could be that we failed to learn from our mistakes. We were dreaming and we were not realistic enough. As a matter of fact, there is a number of reasons behind what is happening today. But the efficiency of dialogue, be it ecumenical or between religions has become weaker.

## - Unhealthy minority

### • How do you view the challenges that the Christians face in the Arab World and The Middle East? Is it true that they are threatened in their existence and mission after they became a minority?

It's not true that Christians have become less than the Muslims in the world. The number of Christians still surpasses that of any other religion and there is no room for comparison. However, Christians are

being persecuted in many countries today, something we have not seen 50 years ago.

Christians have been a minority since the twelfth century in the Arab region. Back then, before the Advent of Islam, they were the majority and remained so in some parts of the Arab region, up until the third Hegire century. If we refer to The History of Damascus by Ibn Asakir, the Christians remained a majority until the end of the second century. This means that Christians have become a minority in the Arab region at least since the twelfth century. The real problem however does not lie in numeral minority. It's the feeling of being a minority that constitutes the real problem. The Bible declares: "Fear not, little flock". It matters not whether we were a little or a large flock. What matters is that we are effective, influential and brave instead of being paralyzed by fear and isolated.

Many examples in the Bible support what we say: "You are the light of the world ... you are the salt of the earth." The scope of light is much smaller than the shadow of mountains, valleys and deserts. The quantity of salt is small relative to the rest of the Earth. I am not saying we should ignore numeric scale. The real problem lies in the way we cope with it. In other words, if people kept on thinking that they are a minority to avoid the fate of their extinction, must stay and persist by all means, they will inevitably reach a dead end. This way of thinking and acting will keep us in paradox and speed up what we fear. The great evidence is the migration of Christians who often say "this country is no longer ours, we are a minority and we have to emigrate". Christians, by migrating, contribute in further decreasing the Christian minority.

## INTERVIEW

### DR. TAREK MITRI

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So we have to think differently, we are a minority in certain things but we are a majority in others! If we expand the range of our values partnership with others, we become many. If we gain the respect of the majority and forge with them relations of cooperation and trust, we become many. If we establish institutions that are at the service of everyone, like our fathers used to do, our influence will be larger than our size. In addition, these institutions often spread Biblical values even if we don't always label them as such. Christians of the Nahda (Renaissance), at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century,

states are disjointed and above the rule of law. Who shall protect us? The French, the Americans, the Russians or the Iranians? We are all well aware that the protection from foreign states is but a delusion. We shouldn't be selling people delusions. There are those who tell the Christians that the Russian President Vladimir Putin will protect them. But the question is: did the Christian remain in Syria with Russia's military intervention there? Did Russia's intervention in stabilizing the regime help in protecting the Christians? Did this intervention help in decreasing their emigration? In the contrary. Christians migrated even more

“ THE MECC DRAWS ITS MAJOR SIGNIFICANCE FROM KEEPING ALIVE THE CONCEPT OF DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION BETWEEN CHURCHES ”

played a crucial role in bringing a great deal of change despite being a minority. They contributed however in changing the whole region. They were a minority still but accomplished feats beyond their scale. Thus the role that one occupies is greater than numerals and testimony is more important than self-preservation. One can preserve oneself better through testimony than by being a recluse. Humans suffocate when they close doors.

#### - Openness rather than protections

#### • So you are calling for openness, despite the recurrent speech that minorities need protection?

I think we have no other option but openness. What protects us is the national state, but our

since Russia's intervention in Syria. Emigration is a measure of protection, and hence we ask: how did Russia protect the Christians in Syria? Accordingly, anyone knowledgeable in Russian politics knows that their priority behind their military intervention is not the protection of Christians. Their intervention was motivated by political tactics. The Russian military would occasionally intervene to protect a Christian village in the province of Hama threatened with bombing for instance. But this strategy does not create a long lasting policy of protection. The age of protections has long gone, and the twenty first century is nothing like the nineteenth. It is not evident that France's protection of Maronites and Greek Orthodox, and Austria's protection of the Melkite Catholics had any lasting effect. These

policies were short lasting and they may have put minorities in a position of conflict with the majority. However, the nineteenth century is over and we cannot go back to it. In the 21st century, States have changed and so has the interplay of international politics.

• **Through this depiction of the Christians situation in the Middle East, how do you assess the role of the MECC amidst these challenges?**

The MECC's role lies in keeping the dialogue between Christians alive and continuous. It shouldn't allow them to give in, each in their corner, content in preserving their own identity. The MECC should always remind them that the horizon of isolation is closed. We as Christians have a communal faith and problems, hence our ongoing dialogue and solidarity. Accordingly, the MECC should invite us to cooperate and participate with and for others, not against them. For the MECC was established upon two principles:

-The first concludes that openness among Christians is far better than the isolation of every Christian upon themselves. The second principle establishes that we should come together for everyone and for the common and public good, and not together against the others.

- **Solidarity and cessation of hostilities**

• **Moving to the problematic of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, how can we create a sort of balance between the human, national and diplomatic sides?**

We have to seek and find balance between moral

and humanitarian duties, whilst respecting human rights and refugee rights. Lebanon for instance, by signing the 1951 Convention, committed to respecting the rights of refugees. Lebanon has therefore to create a balance between respecting international agreements and national sovereignty. Lebanese citizens should in addition have a policy for dealing with new incomers.

The dignity of people cannot be violated, nor can their humanity be abused because of a given law. In the name of our human values, we cannot turn a blind eye on actual problems occurring in today's society because of displacement and migration.

The problem in Lebanon is the absence of a policy upon which all Lebanese agree. We have rather conflicting politics and each party takes advantage of this conflict to mobilize the masses. There are those who believe that they will obtain more votes if they glorified hate speech against the Syrian and Palestinian refugees. They invest in the politics of hatred and contribute in its making. If we open the door to the dormant monster of hatred and racism within us, we will destroy us all.

• **Do you see the MECC today able to fulfill the role of openness and solidarity towards the others, not against them?**

I am fully aware of course, given the current situation in which we are today, that the job of the MECC has become more difficult than before. Perhaps the Council's resources are fewer than in the past, but this is relative and does not affect the MECC's mission. We have a great responsibility in stopping the downfall towards more division, disconnection, enmities and creation of enmities. ■



## VISIT

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**Pope Francis received a delegation from the MECC headed by its Secretary General:**

**The Synodality is the basis of the ecumenical path, “Kairos ME Towards Churches Global Compact” project have my blessing and support.**

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**September, 2 2019**



During the forty minutes meeting, Dr. Bechealany presented a brief on the history of MECC and its ecumenical mission, thanking the Pope for the exceptional initiatives to strengthen the ecumenical processes to serve the witnessing for Jesus Christ as a servant of human dignity. Afterwards, Dr. Bechealany stressed the core of the path of “Kairos Middle East Towards Churches Global Compact” process, which

His Holiness Pope Francis received in his office at the Vatican City the MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany, at the head of a delegation that included the MECC director of theological and Ecumenical Department Rev. Fr Gaby Hachem, the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Lebanon Rev. Fr. Roupheal Zougheib and the MECC Policies and Communication Advisor Ziad El Sayegh.

***Bechealany: the world awaits a prophetic voice in the face of rising waves of populism, racist, nationalism and extremism***

carries a filial convergence with the Pope's vision and his apostolic positions at this delicate period in the history of the Middle East and the world.

The Secretary General asked the Pope for his Apostolic Blessing, pledging to complete the path of KCGC before the next General Assembly which will be held in Baghdad, Iraq, in September 2020.

Moreover, the Secretary General emphasized that Christians are not minorities and are not in need of any protection, but by their testimony, they are building bridges with their partners of all religions in the region and the world.



## Pope Francis: Pray for me

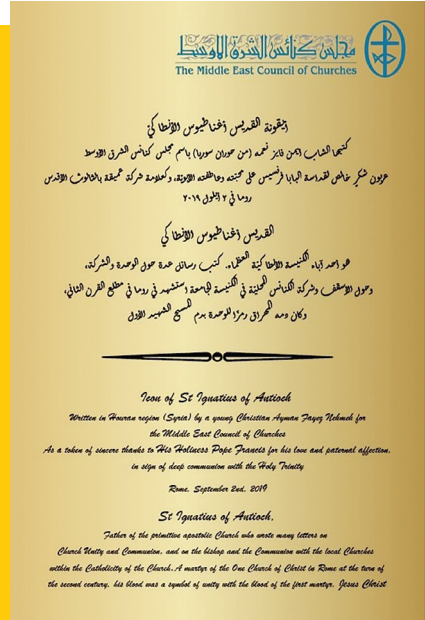
From his part, His Holiness Pope Francis welcomed the MECC Secretary General and the accompanying delegation, and reminded them of Dr. Bechealany intervention at the ecumenical meeting in Bari on July 2018.

The Pope called on MECC to work hard to an effective development for the concept and experience of synodality, which is at the heart of the Church's unity and the strong expression of the dynamicity of the Holy Spirit in it.

Pope Francis praised the efforts of the Secretary General as a woman at the head of the Council, and reminded her and the delegation that "the Church is a woman, is it not the bride of Christ?"

After receiving the Blessing of His Holiness to MECC, Dr. Bechealany has an exceptional wish for his holiness to embark for launching a third Vatican

Council, in the third millennium, as the world awaits a prophetic voice in the face of rising waves of populism, racist, nationalism and extremism. The Pope replied: "Pray for me, this is not easy." At the beginning of the meeting, the Secretary General had offered Pope Francis an icon of St. Ignatius of Antioch, as a symbol of unity among the Churches, while the Pope granted her and the delegation the papal medal. ■



This is the text that was written on the back of the icon of St. Ignatius of Antioch, presented by the MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany to His Holiness Pope Francis.

## MECC PARTNERS MEETING



**May 7-9, 2019**

THE MECC HELD ITS ANNUAL PARTNERS MEETING AT THE DHOOR CHWEIR EVANGELICAL CENTER- AIN EL QASSIS, LEBANON. PARTNERS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, BODIES AND ASSOCIATIONS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD ATTENDED THE THREE-DAY MEETING THAT WAS MARKED BY STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE MECC'S MISSION AND BY STRENGTHEN ITS LOCAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ROLE AND INFLUENCE. THIS SUPPORT DEMONSTRATED THE IMPACT AND CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL AT THE THEOLOGICAL, RELIEF AND COMMUNICATION LEVELS.

In her speech, the MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany identified four work axes in expectation for the 2020 General Assembly:

- Developing inter-Christian relationships through ecumenical initiatives and common witness at the service of the marginalized groups.
- Promoting inter-Church and interfaith dialogues, and making prophetic stands according to the regional happenings.
- Enhancing communication among Christians in the different Middle Eastern Soci-







MECC's.. The panel was moderated by Rev. Fr Roupheal Zougheib, the National Director of the Pontifical Mission in Lebanon and featured by R. Rev. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union, and of the MECC Evangelical Family and Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, MECC Policies and Communication Advisor.

This project holds a rescue initiative for Christians of the Middle East, by highlighting the role of the Churches in preserving Eastern identities, serving the Christian message and promoting coexistence with Muslims.

The initiative also aims to reinforce the cooperation among MECC, the World Churches and the Council's friends, to come up with a draft recommendations document after four-phase studies in eight countries, including the Gulf States.

ties for inclusive citizenship, social justice, and human rights.

- Using communication and social media will to affect mindsets on the regional and international scales.

### Day two

The second day began with a presentation of a new project titled “Kairos Middle East Towards a Global Charter for the Church”





## MECC PARTNERS MEETING

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### Workshops with Partners

After that, the workshops started for the three main MECC departments. Partners chose each their fields of interest: Communication, Theology and Ecumenism, or Diakonia.

A discussion followed where the Partners shared their opinion on what they witnessed as both reports and workshops.



### Day 3

On the third day, a large group of MECC Delegates and Partners, headed by its Secretary-General, Dr. Souraya Bechealany, visited the

Lebanese President General Michel Aoun, at the Presidential Palace in Baabda. The delegation included Representatives from Egypt, the Holy Land, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Germany, Britain, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the United States.

At the beginning of the meeting, Dr. Bechealany made a speech, saying that the delegation which includes bishops, priests, monks and laymen, came to support MECC's plans and projects and to come out with a global compact for church policies that would affect local and international decisions, in view of preaching human values and protecting human dignity and freedoms in the region and the world.

From his end, President Aoun called on the MECC to help the Lebanese government resolve the Syrians refugees' issue "by persuading Western countries to accept the refugees return to their countries as soon as possible. ■





## **MECC Presidents Meeting : discussing strategies to face the various challenges**

**August 29, 2019**

The MECC Presidents Meeting, called for by the Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany was held at the Patriarchal Monastery of Saint Elias Shwayya on the 29th of August 2019, graciously received by his Beatitude Patriarch John X. Along with His Beatitude Youhanna X Yazigi, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and MECC President of the Council for the Orthodox Family, the meeting was attended by His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans and MECC President for the Catholic Family, and Right Reverend Dr. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon and MECC President Council for the Evangelical Family. The meeting was also attended by members of

the Council's Strategic Support Group, namely, His Excellency Bishop Paul Sayah, Dr. Jean Salmanian and Dr. Michel Abs.

The participants discussed issues relating to the Christian presence in the Middle East, and ways of facing the various challenges, to protect the dignity of the human being in the Middle East and to consolidate the concept of citizenship in the region. The Secretary General outlined the strategies that the Council will adopt to achieve this, through an integrated project based on a unified vision among all ecclesial families. Moreover, The Presidents were briefed on the financial and administrative measures taken by the General Secretariat to enhance MECC's capabilities at the theological, humanitarian and communication level.

The participants also decided on the venue and date of the next General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches and the Executive Committee meeting in 2020. ■

# GENERAL SECRETARIAT ACTIVITIES

## PARTICIPATIONS

### MECC in the International Meeting "Peace with No Borders", Sant'Egidio – Madrid September 15-17, 2019

The MECC, represented by Secretary General Associate Michael Spiro, participated in the 33rd international meeting entitled "Peace with No Borders", convening in Madrid- Spain, from September 15 to 17, 2019.

The meeting, which was organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Archdiocese of Madrid, gathered more than 400 religious personalities from 60 countries of five continents and thousands of pilgrims.



### MECC at the Conference of European Churches September 10- 12, 2019

The MECC represented by its Policies and Communication Advisor Ziad El Sayegh, participated in the CEC Peace Conference which was held at the Institut Protestant de Théologie,



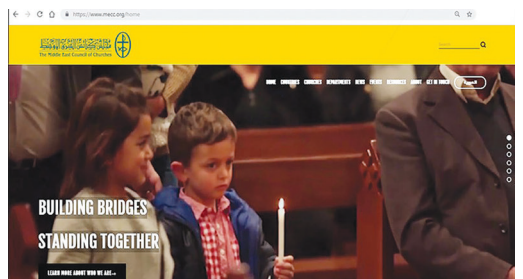
Paris-France. The conference coincided with the CEC 60th anniversary.

Under the title of "The West's Legacy in the Middle East, Challenges and Perspectives", EL Sayegh delivered a speech in which he stressed on how urgent is "to think together about the actions to be taken against the rise of populism, racial nationalism, and xenophobia. El Sayegh concluded his speech with a well- known mantra for the leading Swiss theologian Hans Küng "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions".

### Lauching the MECC newly redesigned website August 28, 2019

Under the slogan "I am making everything new," the Middle East Council of churches launched on Tuesday, August 28, its website with a new look that reflects the ecumenical mission of the Council, which is based on unity in diversity and partnership in the service of human dignity and openness to the other.

The new website is in line with modern communication technologies and copes with the era of image and video.





## **MECC at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Germany August 20, 2019**



The MECC, represented by Egypt's Immigration and Expatriates' Affairs minister, Dr. Nabila Makram, is participating at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace.

The conference, which was held in the German city of Lindau on Tuesday the 20th of August 2019 under the theme "Caring for our Common Future - Advancing Shared Well-being," was attended by about 100 countries and 900 religious, political and official leaders, as well as high-level representatives of governments. The United Nations has also participated, along with intergovernmental organizations and activists in promoting tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Minister Makram took part in a special session entitled "Mena Women of Faith as Peacemakers," during which she spoke on behalf of MECC about the role of women to establish and promote the principles of peace and dialogue. She also insisted on the role of women in bringing together the followers of religions, especially in the Middle East the birthplace of the 3 Heavenly religions.

## **A Spiritual Meeting for the MECC team in Syria August 2, 2019**

The MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department (TED) organized a spiritual meeting for the Council's team in Syria on Friday, August 2, 2019. Father Gabi Hachem, the director of the TED, and Mr. Samer Laham the director of the Diakonia Department participated in this meeting which was entitled "Tabitha, Arise".

The title of the meeting embodies genuine fraternity and the love of Jesus through loving the other. The meeting started with a prayer and a reading from the Holy Bible.

Following the spiritual retreat, the team visited the Patriarchal Monastery of Our Lady of Saydnaya, and met the prioress, Mother Fibronia. They also met the abbot of Saint George Monastery, Archimandrite John Talli.



## **A delegation of Irish Institutes at MECC August 1, 2019**

A delegation of professors and students from the Priority Institute, TCD and DCIF met the MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany and the MECC Director of the Theology and Ecumenical

## GENERAL SECRETARIAT ACTIVITIES



Department Rev. Fr Gaby Hachem at the Council's Headquarter in Beirut.

During the meeting, the delegation was acquainted with the MECC and its future projects.

### MECC at the “Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom”

**July 15-18, 2019**

For the second year in a row, the MECC, represented by Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, President of the National Evangelical Union in Lebanon and of the MECC Evangelical Family, participated in the “Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom” conference, which was organized by the US Department of State at its headquarters in Washington DC.

The conference, which took place from 15 to 18 July 2019, brought together more than 1,000 people from 114 countries, and was followed by a special meeting of some 80 foreign ministers from around the world. From his end, Rev. Dr. Badr



insisted that MECC should be seen and treated as the main interlocutor when discussing any issues related to the Christians of the Middle East, or when making decisions regarding their present and future existence.

### Workshops on building MECC Team Skills

**April to July 2019**

The MECC's team participated in a training workshop on “Team Building and Management” strategies, which was organized by the Council in collaboration with the “Institute for Leadership Development”. The participants were instructed by the Secretary General of the Bible Society Mike Bassous.





## **MECC Condemns Terrorist Qamishli Bombing July 12, 2019**



The Middle East Council of Churches condemns the terrorist bombing which took place on Thursday July 11, 2019, in front of the Church of Our Lady in Qamishli-Syria. In a phone call to His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, MECC Secretary General Dr Souraya Bechealany denounced this criminal act and declared complete solidarity with the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Dr. Bechealany and His Holiness Aphrem lifted common prayers for the victims of the bombing to be healed.

## **Visit to MECC by a Delegation from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs July 9, 2019**

A Delegation from the Danish Ministry of Foreign

affairs visited the MECC Head Office in Beirut on Tuesday July 9. They were received by MECC Policies and Communication Advisor Ziad El Sayegh and MECC Director of the Communication and Public Relations Department Huguette Salameh, representing MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany.

The Danish delegation, formed by Freedom of Religion or Belief Ambassador Mr. Michael Suhr, Special Advisor Mr. Nis Gellert and Ms. Mathilde Silje Helø from the Royal Danish Embassy in Beirut, was briefed on the MECC role and activities.

## **AUB Conference on “The Crucial Role of Local Faith Actors Delivering the Global Compact on Refugees June 18, 2019**



MECC participated in a conference on “ The Crucial Role of Local Faith Actors Delivering the Global Compact on Refugees”, held on Tuesday, the 18th of June, at the Issam Fares Institute,



## GENERAL SECRETARIAT ACTIVITIES

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Beirut. The role of local faith actors in managing the Refugees and Migrants crisis in the host countries was emphasized. Therefore, these major players must be supported to continue their work in reducing the burden of the Refugees especially in Lebanon, one of the biggest host countries. The conference also aimed at finding common ground to deal with more than 65 million refugees around the world, including millions of displaced persons.

### The Ecumenical Program “Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counseling” under the patronages of the Chaldean Patriarchate

June 9- 15, 2019



The MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department (TED) organized, an ecumenical program of Trauma Healing and Spiritual Counseling for pastors in Iraq on June 9 to 15, 2019. Eighteen priests, pastors, nuns, and laymen in leading positions of the local church institutions benefited from the five-days program which took place at the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchal Seminary of St. Peter, in Ankawa – Irbil. MECC team was headed by the Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department, Rev. Fr. Gaby Hachem, the Executive Director

Sister Emily Tannous, and 4 Psychological and spiritual counseling specialists.

This ecumenical program aims at empowering the trainees and providing the necessary spiritual, intellectual and physical means to restore their self-confidence, explore their strengths and weaknesses, and improve their performance in Church institutions and in the communities that they serve.

### A German Delegation of Students and Professors visited MECC Headquarters June 12, 2019



A delegation of 16 students from the Catholic Institute of the University Aix-la-Chapelle in Germany accompanied by three of their professors, visited the MECC Headquarters in Beirut on Wednesday June 12, 2019.

The Delegation headed by Dr. Harald Suermann from Missio foundation got acquainted with the work of the council and got more insights into the importance of the coordination of the different churches in the Middle East. Moreover, the students learned more about the role and function of the MECC as well as the goals that the council has already accomplished since its foundation.

## The Peace Flame lighting in Syria

June 2, 2019



The MECC Secretary General Dr. Souaraya Bechealany attended the Iftar which was held at the Four Seasons Hotel in Damascus by His Beatitude John X Yazigi, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All The East, in honor of the Serbian Patriarch His Holiness Irinej,. Dr. Bechealany also participated with His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and he Primate of the Syriac Orthodox Church, in laying a wreath at the martyrs of the Syriac genocide memorial “Sefo”, and in lighting the flame of peace, at Cathedral of Saint George- Damascus, during the reception of His Holiness Patriarch Irenaeus Irinej, accompanied by HB Patriarch John X Yazigi.

## MECC delegation hosted by the Danish Church

May 24-31, 2019



At the invitation of the Danish diocese of Aalborg, a delegation from the Middle East Council of Churches conducted an Ecumenical visit (May 24-31, 2019) to learn about the Lutheran National Church, its service and life in Denmark and to acquaint the parishes and the believers with the situation of the Church in the Middle East, and the council’s humanitarian and social situation. The delegation was led by Father Gaby Alfred Hachem, Director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department. DANMISSION had the utmost priority in preparing and facilitating the visit.

The delegation representing the four ecclesiastical families of the council, consisted of eight members, women, men, priests, secularists and youth, dispersed in the parishes.

## MECC attended FELM International

Consultation Workshop

May 15-19, 2019



The Middle East Council of Churches represented by its director of “Diakonia” department Mr. Samer Laham attended the International consultation workshop from May 15 to 19, 2019, at the invitation of Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission “FELM” which celebrates the 160th anniversary of

## GENERAL SECRETARIAT ACTIVITIES

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its founding.

The main objective of the workshop was to review the FELM strategic plan from 2017 to 2022 with 26 partners from different countries. The program was based on interactive workshops that divided participants by continents, regions and topics.

In this context, MECC shared its mission and vision as well as its values through open plenary discussions. Its participation was very effective and positive in all the working groups and opened the door to strengthen the relationship with FELM in the future.

### The return of ATIME

May 17-18, 2019



With the blessing of the Presidents of the Churches in the Middle East, the Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East (ATIME) was relaunched after a strenuous endeavor of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department. Eighteen deans, directors, and delegates from all the faculties and institutes member in ATIME from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq held their first meeting between 17 and 18 of May at the Saint Augustine Center-Lebanon, after ten years of suspension of the ATIME activities.

During the meeting, the executive board of the ATIME was elected and included representatives of the four families: Rev. Fr Tanius Khalil as President, Rev. Fr Edgar Al Haybi as Executive Secretary General, and Rev. Fr. Bishoy Hilmi Ibrahim Abdelmalek, Rev. Fr Bassam Nassif, and Rev. Samuel Razfi as associate executive secretary generals.

In turn, The Middle East Council of Churches considered that the Association's return to its activities had achieved a fundamental goal of building bridges and promoting joint ecumenical action in the fields of theological formation.

### MECC at a coordination and planning workshop

May 12-13, 2019



The Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) in the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) held a coordination planning workshop in Istanbul between 12 and 13 of May 2019.

The MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany and Dr. Audeh Quawas the President of DSPR Central Committee participated in the workshop, in the presence of the Central



Committee members, as well as the Regional Directors.

### **Joint statement condemning the recent armed escalation in the Gaza Strip**

**May 9, 2019**

The MECC, WCC AND ACT ALLIANCE denounced in a joint statement The dangerous four-day armed escalation (May 3 to 6, 2019) between Israel and Palestinian armed factions in the Gaza Strip.

The 3 organizations expressed their deep concern over the latest hostilities and their belief that the present situation in the Gaza Strip is morally and ethically untenable.

The statement called on all parties to face up to their responsibilities and “seek ways to protect the civilian population, especially women and children from recurring military confrontations that can only exacerbate an already tense situation and ongoing humanitarian crisis”.

Moreover, the statement expressed the beliefs of the organizations that “the military option will never be conducive to a lasting and just resolution

of the longstanding conflict”, and called on to work for an end to the recurring confrontations, and for a just peace that will ensure that all may live in peaceful coexistence.

The attendees also affirmed that “all people are created in the image of God. We are all called upon to respect and protect the human dignity and rights of all”.

### **Delegation of the Danish Church at MECC April 10, 2019**

A delegation from the Danish Diocese of Viborg visited Lebanon in collaboration with the Dan mission organization. The group of 20 priests and leaders of the Danish Church, met the MECC director of Theological and Ecumenical department, Father Gabi Hachem, on Thursday April 14, at the Council's Head Office- Beirut. The delegation was briefed on the council's Theological, Ecumenical and Relief activities and got acquainted with the situation of the churches in Lebanon and the Middle East and the ways to support and cooperate with them. ■





## VISITS

### Middle East Council of Churches in the Consortium for Inclusive Citizenship and Diversity in Abu Dhabi September 9, 2019



The Middle East Council of Churches had participated in the meetings of “Wellton Park” initiative, and the “Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies”, and “Adyan” Foundation; represented by the General Secretary Dr. Souraya Bechaalany, Father Gaby Hashem as Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, accompanied also by the Policy and Communication Advisor Ziad Al Sayegh, they joined the Consortium Working Group held in Abu Dhabi to discuss the Charter for Inclusive Citizenship and Diversity in the Arab Countries that will be launched in 2020.

On the occasion, the delegation had a special meeting with the President of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah, who focused on interfaith dialogue and the role of citizenship fostering diversity, as well as ways of cooperation between the council and the forum to promote a culture of dialogue and preserve human dignity.

### MECC in a visit to NECC- Jordan August 20, 2019

The MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany visited the “Near East Council of Churches Committee for Refugee Work” (NECCCRW) of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR), in Amman Jordan, on Tuesday, August 20, 2019. During her meeting with the heads of the Department, Dr. Bechealany was briefed on the Department's work and its humanitarian and relief activities. This visit aimed at the continuous working together among the various MECC offices and departments in the Middle East in the service of human dignity.



### Visit to His Beatitude Theophilos III August 20, 2019



His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of the Holy City and all other Palestine and Jordan received the MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany at the Patriarchate headquarter in Jordan.

The visit was aimed to brief His Beatitude on the MECC projects and its development, as well as the preparations of future activities, most notably the upcoming General Assembly meeting in 2020. Moreover, the assembled discussed the activities of the MECC's Jordan office and its role in Jordan and the Holy Land.

### Meeting with Cardinal Sako in Ankawa June 2, 2019

His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Louis Raphael Sako received the MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya

Bechealany, at the Patriarchal residence in Ankawa - Erbil. The attendees discussed theological, relief and instructive issues, as well as ways to activate the MECC's role in Iraq. The delegation also participated in the graduation ceremony of 23 students from Babylon College of Theology and Philosophy in Ankawa. The meeting was attended by the Patriarchal Assistant Bishop Mar Baselios Yeldo, the Director of Theological and Ecumenical Department Father Gaby Hachem and the Department's Coordinator Sister Emily Tannous.

### SG visits to Patriarch Absi and MECC's Office in Syria

June 3, 2019

The Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany visited His Beatitude Youssef Absi, Patriarch of Melkite Greek Catholic Church, to congratulate him on the founding of the first Faculty of Theology in Syria. Bechealany stressed the readiness of MECC to support this project, particularly through the Council's support to the Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle (ATIME).

Bechealany concluded her tour in Syria with a visit to the MECC's office in Damascus, where she was briefed on the activities and programs of Diakonia.



## Faith Based Organizations' Actions in the service of human being

### Middle East Council of Churches and Diakonia

Committed to uphold human dignity not in words but in deeds, the Middle East Council of Churches through its DiaKonia department helps survivors of manmade disasters and military conflicts through the provision of all kinds of humanitarian and protection support that preserve the dignity and wellbeing of affected people. The council has adopted a new strategy to combine the humanitarian interventions with special programs that enable beneficiaries to retain their resiliency and coping better with their situation. From the outbreak of Palestinian cause through the several conflicts and wars that Middle East has been passing through, the council outreached millions of affected people through the provision of food and nonfood items, shelters, financial and health assistance, protection programs, rehabilitation of disrupted civil services as well as construction projects, livelihood programs, water and sanitation, education and finally capacity building programs. The council performs its humanitarian mission in partnership with local churches and in coordination with other actors on the ground. The added values of the council' programs are to enhance the concept of reconciliation and peace through

the variety of its programs and by providing a safe space to develop positive relationships among all affected people whose backgrounds are different and pave the road towards a better shared future. The message of love and respect to served people are the corner stone of the council mission for which the council adopted the moto: "Service in Dignity ". The MECC in parallel with its humanitarian programs continues to advocate about issues related to refugees' rights and their protection according to international humanitarian law and Christian principles and values.



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