MIDDLE EAST
OVERVIEW

December 2019
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1. BACKGROUND

When skimming through headlines of Middle Eastern media outlets, one cannot but notice news of revolutions contending with corruption and state oppression. This mass mobilization of people opened the eyes of regional decision makers and forced them to alter their actions, although to a limited extent. Still, poverty is on the rise and livelihoods of millions are at stake as an obscure future looms closer. To make things even more enigmatic, foreign powers have started to brazenly intervene using their vast diplomatic apparatuses, which is seen by many as a plausible attempt to shape the ME according to their own agendas; a fact that is adding intensity to the conundrum of the region.

The MECC remains to act at a subtle level, mustering its capabilities to adapt to the ever-changing environment. Although it revises its plan of action to suit the demands of the present, its core mission remains unchanged: to lessen the burdens of ME societies, to build bridges between communities, and to unite Church actions.
2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Egypt

- The Egyptian Parliament extended Tarek Amer’s role as central bank Governor till 2023, since he was considered responsible for saving the Egyptian economy.\(^1\)
- In a statement by Egypt’s Ministry of Local Development, the government will be replacing motorized rickshaws with clean-running minivans, to decrease pollution and modernize the country’s transport system.\(^2\)
- According to a report published in December, over the past 2 years Egypt’s non-oil private sector has contracted to its lowest in November 2019.\(^3\)
- The “Future Cities in Egypt” Conference organized by the Lebanese Business and Economy Group and presided by Egypt’s Minister of Investment and International Cooperation Sahar Nasr, was held on the 8th of November to attract investments. The ministry hoped that this will lead to new road and bridge construction projects, energy and electrical networks, and sanitation networks.\(^4\)
- Tarek Amer, the governor of The Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) advised the government to grant tax incentives to the industrial sector within the near future since it is on the rise.\(^5\)
- Egypt signed an agreement with the UAE’s Al Nowais Investments, for the construction of two solar power plants which will cost 990 million USD.\(^6\)
- 16.0853 EG/USD official currency exchange rate.\(^7\)

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Jordan

- The IMF and Jordan began discussions to reduce a record $40 billion public debt, by replacing an earlier three-year agreement with a new program.\(^8\)
- Jordan during December, took the decision raise public sector wages in an attempt to prevent civil unrest.\(^9\)
- Mohammad Ississ, Minister of Finance present the 2020 draft state budget to the Lower House, claiming that there is an estimated deficit of 1.8 billion USD.\(^10\)
- Jordan’s King, His Majesty King Abdullah and Azeri President Ilham Aliyev convened in Baku to discuss expanding bilateral ties and cooperation in economy, investment, tourism, agriculture, and defense industries.\(^11\)
- German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Jordanian government signed an amendment to extend their Support for micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses program to 2024 instead of 2022 and increase its budget from 7 million euros to 10 million euros.\(^12\)
- The Jordanian government signed an agreement with USAID to transfer 745 million USD to support Jordan’s economy.\(^13\)
- 1.428 USD Jordanian official currency value.\(^14\)

Iraq

- Foreign-backed militias clashed with Iraqi demonstrators, further escalating violence and increasing the death toll on the streets.\(^15\)
- The Trump administration imposed sanctions on three Iraqi leaders thought to have been backed by a foreign state.\(^16\)

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\(^14\) http://statisticaldb.cbj.gov.jo/index?action=level4


• According to the Iraqi oil minister Thamer Ghadhban, Iraq, OPEC and other producers will decrease its oil production by 400,000 barrels per day.\textsuperscript{17}
• Declared in December, Iraq’s crude oil exports exceeded 105 million barrels in November.\textsuperscript{18}
• Iraq and the ILO (International Labor Organization) have agreed to initiate the first Iraq Decent Work Country Program (DWCP), to strengthen Iraq’s capacity to mainstream decent work in social and economic policies.\textsuperscript{19}
• 539 Dinar /USD Iraqi official currency exchange rate.\textsuperscript{20}

**Lebanon**

• Caretaker PM Saad El Hariri asked Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, China, Russia, Italy and the United States to secure credit lines as the country struggles with the dire situation of its economy.\textsuperscript{21}
• Lebanon’s central bank took emergency measures by imposing a temporary interest-rate cap of 5% on dollar-denominated bank deposits and 8.5% on local-currency deposits received or renewed after Dec. 4.\textsuperscript{22}
• Employees and public figures associated with public and private health sectors in Lebanon warned that soon, hospitals will no longer be able to purchase equipment needed for surgery and urgent-medical care.\textsuperscript{23}
• According to Economy Minister Mansour Bteish, the Lebanese economy is now losing about $70m to $80m a day due to the political paralysis in the country.\textsuperscript{24}
• The Rating agency Fitch downgraded Lebanon to CC and warned that the country will most likely default on its debts.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{18} Xinhua Net, Dec 1, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/01/c_138597575.htm
\textsuperscript{20} http://www.cbiraq.org/DataValues.aspx?dtFrm=10/31/2003&dtTo=02/18/2019&tmld=175&dtformat=MMM,yyyy
\textsuperscript{25} Financial Times, December 12, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/6bd0cd4a-1cee-11ea-97df-cc63de1d73f4
- The IMF (International Monetary Fund) and The World Bank have rejected caretaker PM Saad El Hariri’s request for financial aid.26
- After weeks of political deadlock and postponement of parliamentary consultations, Hassan Diab was selected as Designate-Prime Minister.27
- 1507.5 LBP/ USD Lebanon official currency exchange rate.28

**Palestine**
- According to a UN report, Palestine loses an annual 2.5 billion USD due to Israeli occupation.29
- Israeli authorities during December, have released 5,000 calves imported directly from Palestine.30
- Germany and the Palestinian authority sign 76 million euro agreements to support vital West Bank and Gaza projects.31
- The United States Congress rejected a 175 million USD request from the White House to fund the Middle East "peace plan" which includes Palestine. 32

**Syria**
- U.S. President Donald Trump signed a Syria sanctions bill as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the 2020 defense budget. The bill, Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act of 2019, authorizes additional sanctions and financial restrictions on institutions and individuals doing business with the Syrian regime.33
- According to the U.N, the currency’s collapse could throw more Syrians into poverty as prices of food and commodities increase sharply, putting more pressure on Syrian President’s government, already reeling under international sanctions. 34

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28 http://www.bdl.gov.lb/
• The Syrian parliament ratified on December 16 three oil contracts signed between the government and two Russian oil companies.  
• The Syrian government has issued a new tender for purchasing Russian wheat, as the two countries seek to expand their ties in the grains sector.  
• The Syrian government has further reduced the list of imported goods it will finance at a favorable exchange rate, risking an increase in the price of some key commodities.  
• The Ministry of Economy and the Central Bank of Syria have tightened the conditions to obtain an import license as they seek to reduce the sale of foreign currencies.  
• Official Current Exchange Rate USD/SP: 910

Cyprus

• According to Finance Minister Harris Georgiades, the country’s economic growth is expected to slow down to 2.9% in 2020.  
• Finance Minister Harris Georgiades, warns Cypriot authorities that reform is still needed to save the economy and to maneuver past the uncertainties of Brexit.  
• India’s new High Commissioner, after presenting her credentials to President Nicos Anastasiade, renewed the country’s support for its sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, denouncing the illegal activities conducted by Turkey.  
• The IMF (International Monetary Fund) released a report stating that Cyprus’s main challenges are low productivity and high private debt, as external risks increase.  
• 1.1 USD Euro official currency value

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36 https://www.syria-report.com
37 https://www.syria-report.com
38 https://www.syria-report.com
40 Cyprus Mail, Dec. 6, 2019, https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/12/06/no-room-for-complacency-says-minister-as-budget-presented/
41 Cyprus Mail, Dec. 5, 2019, https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/12/05/india-and-cyprus-pledge-to-further-boost-bilateral-ties/
3. THE REFUGEE SITUATION (Updated)

Egypt
- In December, several countries made several contributions for the sake of the UNHCR in Egypt. They include Qatar ($4,000,000), EU ($8,800,880), Italy ($5,637,475), Czech Republic ($1,032,950), US ($116,000), Romania ($51,761), Germany ($2,200,220), Denmark ($199,000), Norway ($4,359,672), Spain ($3,740,373), Luxembourg ($2,200,220), and Switzerland ($1,301,302).  
- The UNHCR posted its 108,814,434 USD budget for 2020.
- Deputy Foreign Minister for African Affairs Hamdi Sanad Loza, participated in the Geneva conference in which he reviewed Egypt’s efforts in hosting refugees. His words received strong backing from other participants which called on the international community to stand with Egypt for the sake of the refugees.

Jordan
The UNHCR states that there are currently 654,192 registered refugees in Jordan up until the beginning of December.

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

- 192,667 in Amman Governorate (29.5 %)
- 161,933 in Mafraq Governorate (24.8%)
- 134,585 in Irbid Governorate (20.6%)
- 94,619 in Zarqa Governorate (14.5%)
- 18,446 in Balqa Governorate (2.8%)
- 13,096 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
- 9,301 in Jarash Governorate (1.4%)
- 8,526 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
- 8,376 in Maan Governorate (1.3%)
- 6,590 in Ajlun Governorate (1.0%)
- 3,621 in Aqaba Governorate (0.6%)
- 1,738 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)

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44 http://reporting.unhcr.org/egypt
45 http://reporting.unhcr.org/egypt
• By the end of November, the Winterization assistance has reached 70,974 refugee families, including 53,928 Syrians and 17,046 non-Syrian.
• According to a UNHCR financial update, 42% of the 371.8 million USD needed for refugees is still unfunded.47

Iraq
The UNHCR states that there are currently 234,831 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq.

The proportion of displaced Syrian people registered within the UNHCR up until the beginning of November, are distributed as follows:

- 118,726 in Erbil (50.6%)
- 83,977 in Dahuk (35.8%)
- 29,282 in Sulaymaniyah (12.5%)
- 1,108 in Anbar (0.5%)
- 1,738 in other areas (0.8%)48

• The UNCHR released in December a report claiming that only 35% of the budget allocated for refugees has been funded.49
• The Norwegian Refugee council conducted a survey in which it interviewed Syrians who fled from Turkish operations into Iraq. According to the survey, most refugees rejected the idea of going back and wanted to settle in Iraq permanently. 50
• The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Iraq received an additional contribution of 3 million Euros from The Netherlands to decrease the threat by explosive hazards and allow the return of displaced communities to their areas of origin.51
• Based on recent data, 25,000 IDPs have yet to receive all winterization project items. The highest needs reported are in the following districts: Kirkuk, Mosul, Sulaymaniyah, Sumail and Zakho.52

Lebanon

Since the beginning of December, the number of registered refugees in Lebanon is 916,113.

Refugees in Lebanon are distributed as follows:

- 343,414 in Bekaa (37.5%)
- 242,815 in North Lebanon (26.5%)
- 225,612 in Beirut (24.6%)
- 104,272 in South Lebanon (11.4%)\(^53\)

- Gibran Bassil led a Lebanese delegation to the first Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, where he updated the international committee that Lebanon is witnessing a voluntary return of 1000 Syrian refugees per day due to the deteriorating economic conditions in the country.\(^54\)
- The EU announced that it will grant 297 million Euros for the sake of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.\(^55\)
- The Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD) signed an agreement with the UNHCR, to provide seasonal cash assistance to around 24,900 Syrian refugees in Lebanon.\(^56\)
- An anti-refugee protest took the streets, reflecting the dreadful economic conditions of the country.\(^57\)

Syria

Humanitarian situation:

- The humanitarian situation facing civilians in many parts of Syria is worse than when the year began.
- The current projections show some 11 million people in need of regular humanitarian assistance, 5 million acutely, at an estimated cost of $3.3 billion dollars.
- New ways must be found to restore essential and lifesaving services. To ensure the poorest and those on the brink of poverty do not slip into an even worse state. Moreover, insecurity continues to endanger civilians across much of Syria, including areas away from frontlines.
- Financial support for both the response in Syria and the wider region remains vital to enable the vulnerable families to access their basic needs for daily life.\(^58\)

Northwest: Increased hostilities

-Across the northwest, civilians live with the cost of the continued violence that hostilities have displaced up to 60,000 people in Idleb.
-Rain, cold and winter conditions have compounded hardship for many displaced families and their host communities, while a supply shortage of heating has left Idlib families “burning tires, old clothes, and other household items to stay warm”, The UN coordinator elaborated.

Northeast: Serious situation

-Even though hostilities have recently decreased in northeast Syria, the humanitarian situation remains serious.
-Rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access remains essential for the ongoing humanitarian response serving some 1.8 million people in the northeast.\(^59\)
November 2019 Updates

In November 2019, the humanitarian community tracked about 110,000 IDPs movements across Syria. Due to renewed escalation of hostilities in southern Idleb, a new displacement from Idleb and Aleppo governorates was observed with the majority of the displaced population moving within the Idleb ‘de-escalation’ area. Of the 46,480 individuals who are displaced to Idleb governorate, 43,600 IDPs were displaced from other parts of the governorate while 2,700 individuals were displaced from Aleppo to Idleb governorate. Similarly, the second largest population movement was recorded in Aleppo governorate with around 28,160 individuals, including 19,400 people arriving from Idleb governorate and 6,900 IDPs within Aleppo governorate and the rest from Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates. Moreover, the military operation in Tal Abiad and Ras al Ain area in Ar-Raqqa and Hasakeh governorates also triggered a displacement in these areas. The third largest movement in November is recorded in Al-Hasakeh governorate.
governorate with 15,600 movements of which 9,900 people displaced from within the governorate while the rest moved from Ar-Raqqa to Al-Hasakeh. Ar-Raqqa is the forth governorate where around 12,700 movements tracked in. About 11,200 of these movements are tracked within the governorate while about 1,000 movements were from Aleppo and 500 from Al-Hasakeh governorate.
November 2019 Updates
In November 2019, the humanitarian community recorded about 54,400 spontaneous IDP returnees in different locations across Syria. The majority of these returns were recorded within Al-Hasakeh governorate with 27,900 returns. The second largest movement were to Aleppo governorate with around 8,200 returnees, about 6,600 of which returned from within the governorate and about 1,600 returnees from Idleb governorate. Deir-ez-Zor governorate received the third largest number of IDP returnees with 8,000 spontaneous returns, about 6,500 of which returned from within the governorate, about 900 returned from Damascus governorate and some returnees recorded from Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa governorates. Idleb governorate comes forth with around 4,700 returns of which all returns recorded within the governorate. Dar’a and Homs governorates received about 2,500 and 1,200 returns respectively in November 2019.
Cyprus

- More than 25 companies, met International Protection candidates and asylum seekers at a careers fair organized by the Cyprus Refugee Council at the Nicosia Multipurpose Centre.\(^{61}\)
- A workshop on “anti-racist journalism and the fight against hate speech” was launched by the “AWARE” campaign and the Multipurpose Municipal Centre of Nicosia. During the event, refugees which originate from several countries, shared their experiences in Cyprus and the problems they face.\(^{62}\)
- In a report published by the IOM (International Organization for Migration), 6812 migrants entered Cyprus between January 1 and December 18, 2019.\(^{63}\)
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) held a conference entitled ‘Refugees in Cyprus – Opportunities and Challenges’ to discuss the importance of integrating refugees within the local communities.\(^{64}\)

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\(^{61}\) Cyprus Mail, Dec. 3, 2019, https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/12/03/careers-fair-to-be-held-for-refugees/


\(^{63}\) IOM, December 20, 2019, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iom.int-Mediterranean%20Migrant%20Arrivals%20Reach%20106711%20In%202019%20Deaths%20Reach%201246.pdf

\(^{64}\) Cyprus Mail, Dec. 11, 2019, https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/12/11/focus-on-integration-of-migrants/
4. CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Egypt

- During November, 87 churches have been legalized, increasing the total number churches and buildings which have been legalized over the past year and a half to 1322.65
- His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Holy See of St. Mark, held at the Anba Royce Theatre in the St. Mark's Cathedral in Abbasia, the sixth annual meeting in which he honored Anba Dimitrios, Bishop of Mallawi in Minya, and all the bishops and priests which are serving the poor.66
- The Egyptian Cabinet approved a draft law on the establishment of the “Catholic Church Endowments” and Evangelical bodies in Cairo.67

Jordan

- His Beatitude Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem Theophilos III proposed to set up a pan-Orthodox meeting in Jordan in February to discuss the current situation in the Orthodox world.68
- The Jordanian Evangelical Council congratulated Archbishop Christoforos Atallah on his appointment as Bishop of Jordan for the Greek Orthodox Church.69

Iraq

- The Chaldean Patriarchate, due to dire situation in Iraq, cancelled all Christmas celebrations, vowing that all the money saved will be given to orphanages and hospitals.70

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• His Holiness Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church called upon NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance of Christians in the Ninevah area of Iraq.\textsuperscript{71}

• Msgr. Bashar Warda, Archbishop of Erbil, Iraq, during a UN headquarters session in New York, warned that the situation in Iraq may evolve into a civil war and many Iraqis may now leave the country for good.\textsuperscript{72}

**Lebanon**

• The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, HB Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, during his sermon at the Balamand Monastery, stressed the importance of politicians to heed the demands of the demonstrators and to form government that can save the country from its dire situation.\textsuperscript{73}

• The Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi during a mass at Our Lady Church in the Patriarchal Edifice in Bkirki, strongly denounced politicians’ practices which have brought ruin to the country.\textsuperscript{74}

• HB Patriarch Youssef el Absi, The Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, presided over a meeting held by the Executive Board of the Supreme Council of the Melkite Greek Catholic community. During the meeting, participants issued a statement about the stagnating situation in Lebanon and that the demonstrations in Lebanon seek to fight corruption and achieve justice.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{71} Albawab News, Dec. 9, 2019, https://www.albawabhnews.com/3826914


Palestine

- HE Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastian Greek Orthodox, called upon churches in Brazil to prevent the transfer of the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem.76
- HE Archbishop Atallah Hanna, in a meeting with an American delegation, discussed the various Israeli ploys to deter the Palestinian cause and how Israel is not sparing any resource to combat the idea of a Palestinian state.77

Syria

- HB Patriarch John X, The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, presided over the celebration of St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus at the Church of St. John of Damascus next to the Patriarchal House in Damascus, with the participation of the Patriarchal Vicar, Bishop Afram Maalouli, Bishop Luka El Khoury, a group of priests and deacons, and a large assemblage of people. During the mass, he prayed for the return of peace to Syria, Lebanon and all the Middle East.78
- During December HH Patriarch Mar Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syriac Orthodox, received several religious dignitaries such as Rev. Fr. Firas Loufti, Regional Superior of the monks of the Order of the Franciscans in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Moreover, he traveled to Belgium where he ordained two priests Dn. Petros Bernar and Dn. Philipos Ricci to be priests and serve at St. Antoine de Padoue Monastery in Charleroi, attended a Christmas Recital at Mor Izozoel Church in Brussels, and convened with His Excellency Mr. Abdel Mawlah Al-Noukari, Charge d’Affaires of the Syrian Embassy in Belgium and Head of the Syrian Diplomatic Body in the European Union, at the Archdiocesan Residence in Brussels.79
- The Armenian Catholic Cathedral of Our Mother of Mercy in Aleppo, reopened after restoration and renovation works finished.80

79 https://syriacpatriarchate.org/
Cyprus

- The green light was given for the restoration of an Armenian Church located in the Halefka area of the Pentadaktylos mountain range, and will be completed after 2 years.81

5. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

KAIROS Consultation Seminar (Dec. 6-8)

The Theological and Ecumenical Department of the Middle East Council of Churches has launched its process entitled "Kairos Middle East Towards Churches Global Compact" in a first consultation seminar that brought together about 25 experts in theology and geopolitics from Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Cyprus and Jordan. The seminar took place over a three-day period from 6 till 8 December 2019 in Bethania, Lebanon.

Attendees of the KAIROS consultation seminar, Dec 6-8, 2019, Photo Credit: MECC website.

The first consultation seminar focused on drafting a scientific white paper that combines the theological and geopolitical aspects to address the challenges faced by Christians and their fellow citizens in the Middle East, as well as their presence and ecclesial role in the public sphere.

During the opening session of the seminar, Dr. Souraya Bechealany, Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches, highlighted the importance of this process in shedding the light, from realistic and prophetic perspectives, on the role of Christians in the region and their fight for human dignity. Then, Father Gaby Hachem, director of the MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department talked about the process’s approach and about its short, medium- and long-term goals, while stressing the message of love and peace in a wounded world with a special focus on the poorest and most marginalized people.

The participants were then divided into two groups: the first one focused on the geopolitical aspect of the Christians’ situation in the Middle East while the second delved into the theological aspect of this topic.

On the last day, a joint meeting was held between the two groups who agreed to continue the process in order to prepare a draft white paper, through a participatory approach, before officially submitting it to the Churches.

**MECC at the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies - Abu Dhabi (December 9-11)**

Dr. Souraya Bechealany, the Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches, attended the forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies held in Abu Dhabi between 9th and 11th of December. During the event, she delivered a speech in which she stressed preserving religious monuments is also the preservation of our humanity, our dignity, and of our arab and world history; it is a common cultural heritage which everyone must seek to protect. She made use of references within the bible to convey her message.

*Dr. Souraya Bechealany at the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu Dhabi, December 9-11, 2019, photo credit: MECC website.*
MECC at the UNHCR Refugee Forum in Geneva (December 9-11)

Represented by Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, Policies and Communication Advisor, the MECC participated in the Refugee Forum organized by the UNHCR in Geneva, December 9-11. During his intervention he emphasized that Faith based organizations have the challenge of promoting human dignity narratives and policies in the MENA region; they are influencing the policy framework and specially the public opinion sphere and are influenced negative notions such as xenophobia, nation racism, populism and racism, which in turn raise fears, radicalize people, and polarize votes. He also stressed that the faith-based organizations should be involved in protecting human dignity which is the ‘compass’ and that human dignity should prevail in the face of fear, xenophobia, national racism, and populism. Also, the founding principles which are based on human, religious, national, and ethical values are present for the preservation of human dignity. On the same note, he stated that a balance should be struck between humanitarian, sovereign, and diplomatic frameworks to preserve human dignity.

Mr. Ziad El Sayegh at the UNHCR Refugee Forum in Geneva, Dec. 9-11, 2019 Photo Credit: MECC website.
MECC visits church leaders in Egypt (December 20-22)

The meeting with His Holiness, Pope Tawadros II

A delegation from the Middle East Council of Churches headed by Dr. Souraya Bechealany, the Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches, visited a number of church leaders in Egypt. The MECC team included Father Gaby Hachem Director of Theological Affairs and Ecumenical Affairs Department, Sister Emily Tannous, Department Coordinator, Mrs Huguette Salameh, Director of Communication and Public Relations Department, Reverend Rifaat Fekri, Co-Secretary General and Father Dr. Gerges Saleh, former Secretary General of the Council.

The delegation first began its journey by visiting HH Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark of the Orthodox Copts, at the Pontifical Headquarters in Cairo. Dr. Souraya Bechealany thanked him for his permanent support to the Council, and informed him of the steps that have been made at the level of relaunching the Association of Colleges and Theology Institutes in the Middle East, and the re-empowering of the Theological Affairs and Ecumenical Affairs Department, which started implementing many projects that enhance the ecumenical spirit, the most important of which is KAIROS.
In turn, Father Hashem took charge of detailing the path of KAIROS in ensuring the relationship with non-Christians in the Middle East region.

Sister Tannous then presented the program of trauma healing and spiritual companionship to the servants of the parishes, asking his blessing for His Holiness to launch his first work in Egypt in cooperation with the Churches of Egypt. His Holiness also received from the Director of the Communications and Public Relations Department the new issue of "Al-Muntada" magazine and the draft of "Media for Human Dignity" conference that the department is preparing and intended to be held under the auspices of His Holiness in February 2020 in Cairo.

The meeting with Evangelical Church and Priest President Andre Zaki

The delegation continued its tour with a visit to the President of the Evangelical Church in Egypt, His Excellency Reverend Andre Zaki, in the presence of the Reverend Refat Fikry, Secretary-General of the Synod of the Nile. The reality of the Evangelical Family in Egypt and its relationship with the Council of Churches of the Middle East was detailed. Moreover, Reverend Zaki emphasized to support the Council and insisted on recovering its role and location in Egypt, stressing that the absence of the Council in previous years had negative repercussions that no one would have expected. The details of reopening the council’s office in Egypt with the support and assistance of evangelists was presented. Then, the MECC directors of the departments presented their programs and activities intended to be held in Egypt.
The meeting with His Beatitude, Ibrahim Ishaq, Patriarch of the Coptic Catholic Church

The delegation then visited His Beatitude, Ibrahim Ishaq, the Patriarch of the Coptic Catholic Church at the Patriarchate headquarters in Cairo, who affirmed his support for the council and its role among the Churches of the Middle East and the need to distinguish it from the role of the Local Council of Churches in Egypt. His Beatitude renewed the commitment of the Coptic Catholic Church to support the council financially and spiritually to implement all its ecumenical projects in Egypt.

After that, the delegation visited the Archbishop of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, Bishop Munir Hanna, who discussed with his leadership the projects that the Council carried to Egypt. The visit concluded with a meeting with the Bishop of Alexandria of the Armenian Catholic Archbishop Krikor Augustine Kusa at the Archdiocese in Cairo and a presentation of the historical role of the Armenians in Egypt and the location of the Armenian Church and its active role in the Council.
6. MECC Humanitarian activities December 2019:

Lebanon

- Continuation of a Health Awareness course for 240 women, who attended sessions related to mental health and psychosocial well-being, reproductive health, breast and cervical cancer prevention methods and early detection, crucial virus (such as Hepatitis) protection for them and their children, vaccination for the latter as well as First Aid conducted with the Lebanese Red Cross. At the end of the course, the women received dignity and hygiene kits.
- Completed MHPSS and GBV resilience activities in Mount Lebanon for 34 women, to facilitate personal growth and promote mental health. Moreover, 17 of these women participated in group therapy in-depth discussions on non-violent communication.
- Completed PSS sessions for 36 children addressing stress, trauma, and emotions.
- Held Parenting skills and child protection sessions for 30 women.
- Completed 60 hours of home care training for 26 women.
- Completed crochet and embroidery sessions for 34 women as part of the MHGBV program in Mount Lebanon and 72 women in South Lebanon.
Health Awareness Sessions in Mount Lebanon and South Lebanon, December 2019, photo credit: Diakonia.

Group therapy in-depth discussions in Mount Lebanon, Dec. 2019, photo credit: Diakonia.

Syria

- Completed the distribution of blankets, hygiene, relief and school kits for 588 families in Hama rural and Damascus rural.
- Distributed startup kits to 80 vocational training trainees in Maarba and Daraa AlBalad.
- Provided grants to 40 skilled workers in Maarba and Daraa AlBalad.
- Continued remedial classes courses for 250 students in Lattakia and Jableh.
- Continued rehabilitation of two medical centers in Damascus rural.
- Distributed barley seeds kits for 600 beneficiaries in Daraa governorate.
- Distributed 1800 winter adult jackets and 3596 children winter clothing kits in several villages in Daraa governorate.
Distribution of blankets, hygiene, relief and school kits for 588 families, Dec. 2019, Photo Credit: Diakonia

Rehabilitation of six schools in Dara’a, Dec 2019, photo credit: Diakonia
7. CONCLUSION

While the Middle East still suffers from a drastic level of division and humanitarian crisis, MECC is continuously mustering its capabilities to meet the impending challenges. Hopefully, initiatives such as KAIROS will breathe new life into the cracks that failed state policies failed to address. Only through our commitment to uphold diversity, transparency, solidarity, and brotherly communication can the ME region stand the test of time.