



GAZA UNDER BOBARDEMENT

On December 27th Israel launched a military war bombarding Gaza Strip in Palestine using excessive armed forces. Up to the date of editing this news, more than (450) persons were killed, among them children and women, and over (2200) were wounded among them severe cases. 30% among those who were killed are children. According to news and reports, the Israeli war against Gaza is continuing and so far the UN Security Council failed to take an action to stop this war immediately. Likewise the Arab world failed to unite the Palestinians and have inaction against the Israeli aggression or the long standing siege. The humanitarian situation is drastic. Electricity, water, food and other daily needs are black out. Many residential houses, mosques, schools, hospitals and other infrastructure have been destroyed. The MECC issued a statement condemning the military attack on Gaza (Annex 1). Heads of Churches in Jerusalem also issued a statement (Annex 2) and several Christian voices condemned the violent action. The distribution system of food, medical and other essential commodities has been severely hampered. The following report was sent by Dr Bernard Sabella from Jerusalem, Executive Secretary of DSPR Central Committee on December 29th:

"The situation in Gaza is absolutely disastrous as one UNRWA official mentioned. The borders remain closed and the bombardments are inflicting civilian casualties. As a result, Gaza is in most deplorable humanitarian situation as the Israeli air strikes have devastated the governmental and civil society infrastructure such as universities, mosques and other localities where civilians usually congregate. The targeting of individual homes raises concern that civilians would be hurt and entire families would be wiped out. We are deeply concerned about these developments and we are praying and hoping that the Israeli air strikes and naval bombardments would come to a close immediately. Powers and States need to put pressure on the Israeli government to get it to take the decision to stop this awful situation in which hundreds of Palestinians are falling victims, not to speak of the social and psychological scars left by this conflict.

From our reading, the Israeli military is intent to continue with the war on Gaza unless directed to stop by its political leadership. All things need to be done in order that the political leadership in Israel would order the military to stop. Hamas also needs to change the course of armed confrontation and to opt for political talks. The conflict in Gaza and in fact in Israel and Palestine cannot and will not be resolved by force. Only the victims pay the price and politicians are left to weigh the advantages to their positions, especially at the eve of upcoming Israeli elections. In the long run, however, what is right is right and violence will not move us in this land towards an acceptable end of conflict.

DSPR Gaza will use its NECCCRW Health Clinics to receive emergency cases due to the ongoing attacks by air and sea. Our DSPR colleagues are quite worried that the collapse of the medical infrastructure due to the high numbers of injuries will not be able to cope with all injuries. Accordingly, the DSPR health clinics will be used as a first stop for serious injuries until they are transferred to hospitals. Already some of you have read that the 2000 beds in all of Gaza Strip hospitals are not able to deal with the casualties. Besides, medications and vital medical supplies are not arriving due to the hermetic closure of Gaza. So DSPR Gaza is doing the little it can do at the moment with the medical supplies usually available in the clinics sufficient for the time being but certainly not capable of meeting the needs of the seriously or critically injured.

The vocational and educational activities of NECCCRW Gaza have come to a full stop. Many of the teachers and students attending the DSPR Gaza vocational and educational programs come from different parts of the Gaza Strip. Accordingly, for safety reasons all were advised to stay home until the possible risk is altogether gone which we hope will be soon.

DSPR Gaza offices will remain open in a limited capacity, again due to safety considerations but for those of you wanting to contact our Gaza Colleagues, the telephone numbers are as follows:

NECCCRW - DSPR Gaza Offices



+972-(0)8-2822595
+972-(0)8-2860146
+972-(0)599413988 (Constantine Dabbagh's Mobile)
+972-(0)8-2862665 (Elias Manneh - Gaza Area Committee Chairperson - Home)

Ahli Hospital - Dr. Suheila Tarazi
+972-(0)599-747703 (Suheila Tarazi Mobile - Ahli Hospital Director)
+972-(0)8- 2818405 (Ahli Hospital - Gaza)

Our colleague from ACT Geneva, Michael Zschiegner has indicated in the ongoing communication among all ACT Forum and partners that as an immediate measure the ACT Geneva would urge members to increase funding for the on-going MEPL81 Appeal. Please keep this in consideration.

With prayers that this nightmare in Gaza would soon come to an end.

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DSJ UNIT PARTICIPATES IN CAPACITY DEVELOPING STEERING COMMITTEE OF ACT INTERNATIONAL

The Capacity Developing Steering Committee – CDSG meeting of ACT International was held in Le Courtil – Switzerland on 15 –18 of December 2008. The first two days of the meeting were dedicated to TOT training on the Organizational Capacity Assessment - OCA orientation workshops. The second part of the meeting was dedicated to the CDSG Annual meeting, which reviewed the CDI programs in all the regions and updates about the unification of ACT International and Development process presented by Jill Hawkey who spoke of the of consultations held in North, South, East and West regions across the world. Following the workshop CDSG members gathered to brainstorm possible phase II related areas of activity for CDSG members in the future. Participants discussed the possibility of Capacity Assessment Guide Tool, sharing learning among members mainstreaming Guide tool into activities and the involvement of ACT forums. Another mechanism on policy standards that increase and expand ACT International Capacities is the full membership of ACT International of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International – HAP, presented by Disaster Risk Mechanism working group, Deputy Director, Bob White. The meeting was adjourned by the re-election of the co-chairs Herman Brouwer and Seta Hadesian for another term 2009.

For more information contact: meccls@cyberia.net.lb

CONSULTATION ON THE POSSIBLE UNIFICATION CONCERNING PROTECTION OF MIGRANTS WORKERS

WCC Migration and Social Justice program together with MECC Diakonia and Social Justice program met with the heads of the churches in Dubai for a consultation on the possible unification of the churches and activities concerning protection and promotion of livelihood activities of migrant workers in the Gulf countries. The meeting discussed the means and working methodologies of the churches and para -church organizations to improve the quality of life of thousands of migrant workers men and women hired in the construction industry and as maids, mainly in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Oman, Kuwait



and United Arab Emirates. Participants came from the Bible Society, Sat – 7, Seafarers Mission in the Gulf, WCC and MECC members. The meeting discussed as well the organization of a campaign intended for 2009 on the theme of “The voices of migrant workers need to be heard and their concerns to be dealt with”, an advocacy initiative to assist migrant workers meet their daily challenges, mobilize churches and church communities to reach out the migrant workers and advocate for migrant workers rights to have justice in their daily struggle. Participants visited the Philippines Embassy safe house in Abu Dhabi, the St. Andrews church compound and assisted to the Friday mass served by the migrants, and interviewed migrant workers both runaway maids and construction workers, who conveyed their life situation and difficulties while employed in United Arab Emirates. The Dubai meeting underlined the urgency of acknowledging the situation of migrant workers, the local situation and the necessity of the church leaders to built relationship with local authorities and advocate for the migrants on person to person level.

For more information contact: meccs@cyberia.net.lb

MECC PRESIDENTS PARTICIPATE IN A CONFERENCE ON EUROPE & ARAB WORLD CONNECTING PARTNERS IN DIALOGUE

Dialogue between Europe and the Arab world is essential for regional and global development, peace and security. This was the main aim of the conference which was organized in Austria (16-19 December) jointly by the League of the Arab States and the Europe Ministries for International Affairs. The objectives were to broaden and enrich the perspectives of dialogue and intensify concrete cooperation between Europe and the Arab world. Two of MECC Presidents participate in the conference namely: H.E Metropolitan Boulos Matar, Archbishop of the Maronite Church of Beirut, and Rev Dr Safwat Al-Bayyadi President of the Evangelical Churches in Egypt. The conference “Europe and the Arab World Connecting Partners in Dialogue” intended to give impetus to the dialogue process that was successfully started at the Foreign Ministers’ Meeting of the European Union and the League of Arab States in Malta 2008. Several workshops were on the agenda to discuss issues of: strengthening women in society and public life; development of civil society, pluralism and diversity management; promoting inter-cultural dialogue and youth participation in politics and society.

MISSIO PROJECT OF RELIEF FOR IRAQI REFUGEES IN SYRIA & JORDAN

The MECC has ended implementing the project of MISSIO organization in supporting the Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan. The project targeted hundreds of Iraqis in both countries. It offered the support of: distributing school and stationary kits, financial cash support to selected poor families, and food assistance.

For more information contact: ntomeh@cyberia.net.lb, laham-s@scs-net.org

YOUTH STUDY CAMP

The MECC Unit on Education & Leadership development held a youth work and study camp in Egypt (27 – 29 November) under the theme of “Perspectives on leadership development”. The camp gathered 15 women and 25 men from the MECC member churches in Cairo. The camp aimed at developing some skills of leadership among the youth within the strategy of the Unit on capacity development, as well as strengthening the ecumenical spirit among them.

For more information contact: wafa_mecc@go.com.jo, jouna@link.net



MECC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WILL CONVENE FOR AN EMERGENCY MEETING

The MECC General Secretary called for an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee to be convened in Beirut – Lebanon on 15 – 16 January 2009. The meeting will discuss the critical financial situation of the Council, look for possible urgent solutions to overcome the difficulties and the challenges which includes a proposed 5 pages paper introduced by Rev Habib Badr named “road map for MECC’s future”, and assess and evaluate the whole situation of the Council.

For more information contact: guirgissaleh@cyberia.net.lb

ANNEX 1

STATEMENT ON THE PAINFUL INCIDENTS IN GAZA

With great worries, the Middle East Council of Churches followed the latest situation in Gaza Strip after the continuous Israeli armed raid on our brothers and sisters the Palestinians of men, women and children.

The Council condemns all brutal acts which target the innocent civilians.

The Council urges the international community represented by the United Nations and its Security Council to take a decision to cease the fire and the bloodshed, as well as the return to the status of tranquility.

The council calls also on the international community to stretch out the hands to support the Palestinians and ensure the arrival of humanitarian assistance to them.

The Council urges the Palestinian people to stand united in front all efforts that wish to take over their territories.

Guirgis Ibrahim Saleh

General Secretary

Middle East Council of Churches

ANNEX 2

Statement by the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem

On the current devastating situation in Gaza

We, the Patriarchs, Bishops and the Heads of Christian Churches in Jerusalem, follow with deep concern, regret, and shock the war currently raging in the Gaza Strip and the subsequent destruction, murder and bloodshed, especially at a time when we celebrate Christmas, the birth of the King of love and peace. As we express our deep sorrow at the renewed cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians and the continued absence of peace in our Holy Land, we denounce the ongoing hostilities in the Gaza Strip and all forms of violence and killings from all parties. We believe that the continuation of this bloodshed and violence will not lead to peace and justice but breed more hatred and hostility – and thus continued confrontation between the two peoples.



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Accordingly, we call upon all officials of both parties to the conflict to return to their senses and refrain from all violent acts, which only bring destruction and tragedy, and urge them instead to work to resolve their differences through peaceful and non-violent means.

We also call upon the international community to fulfill its responsibilities and intervene immediately and actively stop the bloodshed and end all forms of confrontation; to work hard and strong to put an end to the current confrontation and remove the causes of conflict between the two peoples; and to finally resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a just and comprehensive solution based on international resolutions.

To the various Palestinian factions we say: It is time to end your division and settle your differences. We call on all factions at this particular time to put the interests of the Palestinian people above personal and factional interests and to move immediately toward national comprehensive reconciliation and use all non-violent means to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Finally, we raise our prayers to the Child in the manger to inspire the authorities and decision makers on both sides, the Israelis and Palestinians, for immediate action to end the current tragic situation in the Gaza Strip. We pray for the victims, the wounded and the broken-hearted. May the Lord God Almighty grant all those who have lost loved ones consolation and patience. We pray for all those living in panic and fear, that God may bless them with calm, tranquility and true peace.

We call on all to observe next Sunday, January 4, as a day for justice and peace in the land of peace.

- + Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate
- + Patriarch Fuad Twal, Latin Patriarchate.
- + Patriarch Torkom II, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate.
- Fr. Pier Battista Pizzaballa, ofm, Custody of the Holy Land
- + Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate.
- + Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate.
- + Abune Matthias, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate
- + Archbishop Paul Nabil Sayyah, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate.
- + Bishop Suheil Dawani, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem & the Middle East.
- + Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land.
- + Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate
- + Bishop Youssef Zre'i, Greek Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate.
- Fr. Raphael Minassian, Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

ANNEX 3

Some Reflections on Gaza and its Aftermath

Dr. Bernard Sabella

Jerusalem

January 4th, 2009

Israeli politics with Arab neighbors have always been weighed by the use of force. Israel has once again decided that in order to accomplish what could have been accomplished by negotiation and willingness to compromise; force would be the best solution. Apparently, the objective of the use of force this time is to eliminate the threat posed by rockets launched from the Gaza Strip. But to accomplish this goal Israel is also intent to deal a



deadly blow to the overall infrastructure, both human and material of the Gaza Strip, irrespective of the damage inflicted and the costs to innocent civilians, families and communities as a result of the indiscriminate air power, naval bombardments and shelling. The end objective, accordingly, cannot be accomplished without reducing Gaza to rubbles and holding its people captive. This supposedly would further Israel's political goal of weakening Hamas and rendering its authority and ability to govern questionable.

Observers of the Palestinian, Arab and indeed of the international scene speak of an overwhelming sympathy and support to the people in Gaza and to the Hamas movement. This sympathy, however, translates itself to no more than the needed humanitarian help that at the moment is not effective since the ground war on Gaza has begun and since the air strikes of the last 9 days have made it almost impossible for people to move around freely. Accordingly, the distribution system of food, medical and other essential commodities has been severely hampered. This may be intentional and policy guided by Israel as it aims to drive the Palestinian people of Gaza to their limits with the hope that this would serve the overall Israeli policy of showing that a weakened Hamas cannot cope with the emergent needs of the population.

The tragedy in what is happening in Gaza is not restricted to Israel's use of force as the preferred course of action by the electioneering politicians and their military cohorts. This tragedy unfortunately is also shared by the Arab world with its political divisions and by the World community with its inaction. In the Arab world, the Palestinian issue has become a political tug of war and those rulers who want to climb on the bandwagon have been doing so to serve their own narrow interests often in collision with regional and foreign powers, whose policies are not particularly favorable to our Palestinian people. We have been at pain with the political division in Palestine and yet the call for comprehensive Palestinian dialogue in Cairo has been torpedoed in part by considerations that are not in our interest. If the Arab world were to insist on Palestinian Unity and worked for it as it should have diligently, we would have had one more reason against Israel's pretexts for attacking Gaza. This is not the place to blame but there is apparent frustration among all Arabs and Palestinians not simply with the inaction of Arab rulers in the face of the Israeli war on Gaza but more so with the missed opportunities that these same Arab rulers have lost in order to bring Palestinians together as they took sides between opposing Palestinian factions and parties, thus exacerbating the divisions instead of healing them. Some Arab analysts have argued that it is better to wait on the Palestinian Unity issue after President-Elect Obama takes office in January 2009 and after the Israeli elections in February 2009. The same argument unfortunately has also been made on promoting a new truce with Israel. Our people under siege in Gaza and under continuing fierce Israeli control and occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem cannot wait. Arab politics needs to become proactive and not reactive and to assert Arab interests not with apologetics but with concrete and practical steps that force Israel, Western powers and the world to weigh the Arab world more seriously.



The Western Powers have failed us, in spite of the fact that the French President has shown much more acumen and movement than some of the rulers in the region, with the clear exception of Turkey and its Prime Minister and other officials. The inability of the UN Security Council to come up with a plan to end the Israeli war on Gaza is symptomatic of the delaying tactics, usually employed by the US, in order to enable Israel to finish its work on the ground. Meanwhile, if the Gaza situation has happened anywhere else, the US would be foremost on insisting on an immediate ceasefire, Georgia being the most recent example. The position of the West and its governments, in general, reflects quite poorly on the pretense often made of subscription to universal human values and the adoption of moral and ethical positions, especially in situations of war and conflict. The mass demonstrations across the globe and in Western countries and Capitals show that the decency of ordinary people in expressing their indignation and in calling for an end to the war remains to be matched by their government's actions and deeds.

We Palestinians are at a crucial juncture once again. It is absolutely clear that we need to come together since a house divided cannot withstand the storm nor be able to rehabilitate and reconstruct. Individual or factional agendas should be put aside as we should opt for a national agenda that would bring all of us together. The wounds of Gaza are the wounds of all Palestine and we need together to tend to these wounds as we call on all decent people and powers to do their utmost to stop the war. If Israel and its allies have their way, we will soon be forced to give up control of the Gaza Strip and possibly the West Bank in order to further the control over the population and to make Israel the undisputable Lord of the Land. Besides, it would help Israel greatly if in the process hundreds of thousands of our Palestinian people emigrate, leave or simply disappear or are transferred. The micro politics that has characterized Palestinian politics since the January 2006 elections should change to macro politics. We should adopt a clear course and we should insist that all Palestinian factions and political groups shed their narrow interests and benefits from the current status quo and come together in order to chart this course and to deal with the human, political, social and economic after effects of the Israeli war on Gaza. The rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip and its reconstruction necessitates equally the rehabilitation of Palestinian politics and its regeneration to serve the interest of our people. The challenge is how to get the world with us and to confront the difficult future that lies ahead in 2009 and perhaps for years to come. The more pressing challenge is to stop the Israeli carnage and to bring the war to an immediate stop. But we should never forget what awaits us all in terms of unification, reconstruction and molding a vision for the future of our Palestine.



The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) is a fellowship of churches in the Middle East, which foster the ecumenical movement in the region. It brings together almost all the region's Christians in a body that focuses on strengthening the relations between churches, between Christians and non-Christians in the region, and between members of the body of Christ within and outside the region. In bringing these different churches together, MECC seeks to serve the needs of the broader society, by engaging in diakonical work, advocacy, education and training on behalf of the whole church, rather than one part of it. The MECC is founded in 1974 through its first General Assembly. The Council's head quarter is in Beirut, Lebanon. However, regional offices in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Jerusalem exist.

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