



# MECC News Brief

Issue July – September 2009

**The MECC Executive Committee** convened a regular meeting on 15 July 2009 in Lebanon. The Task force report and the proposed interim structure were the core of the agenda. Rev. Habib Badr, the Task force coordinator, presented the past, present and future situation with maximum clarity and accurate figures where applicable. The Ex.Com expressed interest, determination and commitment to preserve the council. They ratified all the decisions that were taken by the Task Force regarding the staff and properties. The careful discussions have led to many important decisions. The Ex.Com renewed until its next meeting the mandate of the task force to monitor the implementation of the interim structure and to accompany the strategic study.

The Ex.Com recommended that the Churches increase significantly their contribution to financial burden of MECC core budget and activities. The committee decided to launch a local fundraising campaign to support the council.

The Ex.Com approved the agreement with our partners regarding the autonomy of ICNDR and to recommend to the ICNDR board to appoint Mr. Elias El-Halabi as the new director of the program.

**The next MECC/ ICNDR Partners Meeting will be hosted by the National Evangelical Church of Beirut on 26- 27 October 2009.**



MECC Executive Committee Group Picture

## Table of Content:

- .On the Occaosion of Eid Al-Fitr** *Page 2*
- .The Meetings of the MECC General Secrtary** *Page 2*
- .The Gulf Church & Migrant Workers** *Page 3*
- .UNDP-IDC meeting in Geneva** *Page 3*
- .The ICNDR Board meeting** *Page 3*
- .The 3<sup>rd</sup> Ecumenical Seminar** *Page 4*
- . East West conference** *Page 4*
- .Toward a Citizen's State** *page 4*
- .The Young Peace Makers** *Page 5*
- .The MECC Condemned the incidents in Iraq** *Page 5*

## **The MECC General Secretary addressed a letter to our brothers the Muslims on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr,**

which comes after the month of Ramadan, the month of fasting and piety and righteousness and piety. He extended to our brothers the Muslims all over the Arab world in particular and in the rest of the Muslim world sincere heartfelt congratulations and good wishes.

Eid al-Fitr provides the occasion to exchange best wishes with everyone which consolidates the concept of love between Muslims and Christians who constitute one fabric in the Arab world, and give an example of co-existence and love in the same country.

*He asked God*, blessed be his name, to bestow safety on our Middle East and the whole world, and to reinforce the love in our hearts, *May God receives our Prayer.*

## **The MECC General Secretary attended a number of meetings at the WCC Center in Geneva between 28-31 August 2009.**

- He participated in the annual meeting of the Regional Ecumenical Officers (REOs) where he updated the participants on the latest developments the council. The meeting was an opportunity to exchange ideas about the ways to face the financial difficulties that all the ecumenical councils are facing today. He discussed with Rev. Kobia the preparations of the joint WCC-MECC visit to Iraq scheduled in November 2009.

*MECC will host the next REOs meeting in Cairo in April 2010.*

- He participated in the WCC central committee meeting where Rev. Dr. Tveit Olav was elected WCC General Secretary. Mr. Saleh congratulated him on his appointment and expressed the sincere hope that WCC and MECC will deepen their cooperation during his term of office.

- He delivered a speech in Bossey during the honoring ceremony of the outgoing WCC General Secretary Dr. Sam Kobia and offered him a present in the name of MECC.



The MECC General Secretary at the REOs Meeting

- He participated at the Assembly of The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECoT). MECC is a founding and a board member of ECOT. New ecumenical bodies have joined the organization which requires the drafting of a new constitution which will be sent to all members for approval. The next meeting will focus on the expansion of the scope of ECOT's work.

**The idea of organizing in collaboration with MECC touristic visits to the Holy Land and the Middle East will be on the agenda of that meeting.**

## MECC conference on “The Gulf church, Migrant workers and Muslim Society” - Bahrain

The conference took place in Bahrain from 14 -16 September 2009 at Days In Hotel – Manama. The conference was organized by the Al Amana Center, MECC Liaison office in Abu Dhabi.

34 representatives from the Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and evangelical churches were present coming from the Gulf countries of Muscat, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Doha and Bahrain. Four representatives from the Church in Action – Netherlands, the Middle East Council of Churches, World Council of Churches and Christian Conference of Asia were present.

The meeting extended on 3 days and focused on creating an ecumenical platform in the Gulf to collaborate together with a shared vision and commitment with regard to Migrant workers. The conference based on a research carried by MECC, that conducted surveys, interviews with the Gulf Christian leaders, gave the sense and underlined the importance of the role of the church in the lives of the migrant workers.

Three presentations

1- “A Muslim Perspective on Christians and collaboration” by Ahmed Al Mukhairi, Former assistant General secretary, Majlis Al Shawra and advisor to Doha Internal Interfaith Center.

2- “A Global perspective on Human Migration” by William Gois from Migrant Forum in Asia.

3- The presentation of findings of research by Catherine Graham provided the basic and substantial information to address the issue of migration and the presence of Christians in the Gulf.

Presentations were followed by discussions and participants broke into 3 groups to reflect on the need for greater cooperation and coordination in the GCC to effect change and propose steps to be taken in the coming two years to effect change in the conditions for low income expats in the GCC.

The conference proposed a plan of action based on the sense of shared mission and shared priorities that the churches in the Gulf would pursue together in the coming year.

MECC Diakonia & Social Justice Director Seta Hadesian presented the Council perspective and concerns in the formation of this platform.

## MECC participation to UNHCR – IDC Detention Coalition side meeting in Geneva , Palais Des Nation.

Together with UNHCR assistant High Commissioner Ms. Erika Feller and UNHCR staff based in Geneva, IDC Director Grant Mitchell Organized a side meeting on Detention Alternatives and practices around the world on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September at Palais Des Nation. Many State and Country representatives, diplomats, ambassadors, National NGO representatives, more than 200, attended the meeting. Four speakers from Asia, USA, Australia and the Middle East presented alternative practices in their respective countries. MECC – DSJ Director Seta Hadesian presented Detention alternative practices in Lebanon and Detention situation in Lebanon.

In closing the meeting Erika Feller who chaired the session said that two years ago such a meeting could have not taken place and that this was really a positive sign. She reconfirmed UNHCR commitment to have detention (and alternatives, most of all) a high priority for the Office work in the year to come.

Recommendation to alternatives was brought to the front and a guide book on detention to be reviewed and published soon by UNHCR.

## The ICNDR Board

met on Monday 29 September, 2009 at the Maronite Archbishopric of Beirut with the purpose of electing a new ICNDR director.

After extensive discussion, it was unanimously voted to **elect Mr. Elias Halabi as the new director of ICNDR for an interim period of two years until the next General Assembly of MECC in 2011.**

The new director will then be introduced to our international partners at the upcoming meeting of Tuesday Oct. 27.

Mr. Elias Halabi was offered congratulations and encouragement.

**Hope was expressed that our partners will elect to continue their support for the ICNDR budget that had been previously agreed upon in the meeting of November 2008, before the present crisis came about.**

## Third Ecumenical Formation Seminar in Bikfaya

More than eighty representatives of Dioceses, Sunday School and Youth Movements, and ecumenical staff working on different levels of the Catholicosate of Cilicia met in Bikfaya from 10 to 17 August 2009. The program included Bible Studies, presentations on the Armenian Church, its Traditions, Liturgy and History, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue. In addition, at the end of each day the representatives from Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Greece, Iran and North America shared their experiences, concerns, problems and expectations related to the topics.

Welcome address, introductions and the purpose of the seminar were delivered by the Director of the Office of Ecumenical Relations Bishop Nareg Alemezian. His Holiness Aram I gave his blessings and said that the goal of this formation seminar is not only to receive information but also to learn to communicate, share, listen, participate and contribute to ecumenical thought.

MECC Diakonia and Social Justice Unit director Seta Hadesian presented the role of the Council of Churches in the Middle East and the vision and objectives of the Unit on Diakonia & Social Justice programs.

## East/West Peace Building Dialogue

Following the invitation from the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the East/West Peace Building Conference took place in Amman, Jordan from 9 to 13 August 2009. Participants came from both Muslim and Christian communities, from the eastern countries of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, as well as the western countries of Canada and the United States.

With the goal of building understanding and communication between eastern and western cultures, the participants have engaged in lectures, discussions, activities, and cultural outings. In their cultural outings they visited the King Hussein Bin Talal mosque, where Sheikh (Dr.) Hamdi Murad lectured us, visited the Greek Orthodox diocese of Philadelphia.

The participants had the Honor to Meet with His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Bin Talal, and met with His Beatitude Theophilus, The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of the Holy Land.

In the workshops the participants examined the ways in which cultural identities shape our value assessments and filter our views of reality. In the discussions, many participants shared reflections and experiences from their backgrounds.

In the final recommendations the participants stressed that the MECC continues in this process in collaboration with the MCC.



## Toward a Citizen's State

The MECC General Secretary attended on June 30<sup>th</sup> the Launching Ceremony of the National Human Development report under the patronage of H.E. General Michel Sleiman the president of the Lebanese republic.

The report focused on the political, socio-economical and cultural aspects of citizenship. Prominent thinkers, academics and ministers gave inputs and highlighted specific issues related to the report that was prepared in collaboration with the UNDP.

### The Young Peace Makers

The 9<sup>th</sup> MECC Christian Muslim Youth Encounter took place in Cairo 5-9 August 2009. The 30 participants were from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan represented the Four Christian Families and the different Muslim families (Sunnit, Chiite, Druze and Ismaili).

The religious dignitaries and the MECC General Secretary participated in the official opening. After the introduction of the participants & Ice breaking activities there were two case presentations on the Egyptian & Lebanese experience of effective commitment to peace building and the encounter with the Other. There were many areas of focus on the agenda like:

- “Common Grounds between Islam & Christianity in the Context of Peace Building” with *Bishop Yohanna Kolta and Chancellor Dr. Ahmad Al-Fadali as panelists*
- “The Components of Conflicts and their Resolution” By *Ms. Samah Halwani*
- “The Foundations of Joint Endeavors & Conditions for Success” By *Mr. Elias El Halabi*

In addition there was Movie casting and Discussion of “The Imam and the Pastor” documentary and “Hassan & Morcos”.

There were practical applications in small groups on “Building Joint Ventures” and short sketches illustrating “Cases of Conflicts and Joint Peace Initiatives”.

In the Exposure day there were Visits to the religious institutions including: Al-Azhar, Coptic Patriarchate, the Churches in Old Cairo, the Dominican institute for oriental studies and the Young Muslim Association.



Christian Muslim youth group picture

### The MECC Executive Committee condemned the Latest Incidents in Iraq.

The Executive committee members were shocked by the news they received during their meeting in about the brutal and inhumane attacks on churches, the country and the individuals in Iraq. They called upon the Iraqi Authorities to arrest the perpetrators, apply the rule of law and give justice to the persecuted Christians. They called upon our people in Iraq to endure those hardships with patience and steadfast faith and to remove all fears and worries from their hearts and replace them with expectation and hope. The persecuted Church is the land of hope. They called upon our people in Iraq to maintain their active presence in Iraq. They are a source of cultural, civilization and religious diversity. Their presence in Iraq is a must for the east and the west and Iraq is for all its inhabitants.

For more information please contact us on:

**Middle East Council of Churches, Beirut office:**

[mecc@cyberia.net.lb](mailto:mecc@cyberia.net.lb)