



MECC News Brief

Issue January – March 2010

Editorial Note:

The Middle East Council of Churches is preparing for the upcoming Executive committee meeting that will be held in Amman on April 20, 2010. This meeting is hosted by His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City. The Ex.Com will provide valuable opportunity for the church representatives to provide their insights and to elaborate to plan of action of the council for this year.

As we embark in the first quarter of 2010, we are have a firm belief and a renewed commitment to lead our ecumenical council to a safe haven in partnership with all who believe in the importance of joint Christian witness in the Middle East region.

The Middle East Council of the Churches declares its solidarity with the Coptic Orthodox Church:

The Middle East Council of Churches denounced the attacks on innocent peaceful citizens who shed their blood on the night of Christmas, in the town of Nag Hammadi, Egypt. The Council stressed on the historical fact that the Christian Egyptians constitute an intrinsic component of the national fabric of Egypt. The Council called for imposing the severest punishment on the perpetrators who are trying to destabilize Egypt's national unity.

The Full text is available on MECC website www.mec-churches.org

The Middle East Council of Churches appeals to the Iraqi government to make justice to the Christians in Mosul

The Middle East Council of Churches followed with pain and anxiety the sad and painful events that occurred in the town of Mosul in March 2010. A total of 720 Christian families left Mosul in the direction of Tall Afar and Hamdania neighboring regions and more than 12 people were dead."

The Middle East Council of Churches condemns all these violations, declares its solidarity with the Christians of Iraq and urged and to inflict severe punishment on the perpetrators in order to maintain the co-existence between the people of that one nation.

It is important to note that these tragic events which were preceded by assaults on Christians and Christian places of worship in Iraq since 2004 are a source of concern about the Christians of Iraq and that there is a plan to empty Iraq of its Christians who are a vital component of the national fabric of Iraq.

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The visit of the Swedish Church delegation to the Churches in Syria:

A high delegation from the Church of Sweden presided by his Eminence Archbishop Anders Wejryd visited the heads of the Churches and President and the Syrian officials. They also met with some Iraqi refugees in Syria. The MECC office in Damascus organized the visit that took place 13-20 March 2010.

The MECC General secretary Mr. Guirges Saleh delivered a speech entitled: **“Together for Building a better Society”**. He said: *“We, in the Middle East Council of Churches, assert through our work that Christianity is the religion of Love, Peace, and Justice—not of hatred and warfare. The present situation in the Middle East region calls upon us to believe that the Islamic-Christian reunion and cooperation is a duty at the service of humans in our region. Of special importance is working together to reinforce the ideas of love, kindness and faith to counter atheism and other ills caused in our societies due to globalization and its fall-out. This collaboration would set a good example for the Western countries that have considerable Muslim communities integrated in their societies”*.

His Beatitude Ignatios Hazim Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Antioch and His excellency Mr. Abdel Sattar Al Sayed the Minister of Endowment attended the lecture.

Mr. Saleh took the opportunity to discuss MECC and Middle East issues with the Swedish Church officials.

A seed of Love: towards a Balanced Christian Muslim relationship:

“A seed of Love: towards a balanced relationship (the role of the School, Home, Mosque, Church and media in education and formation)” was the title of the interfaith event which will be held in Egypt on February 27, 2010.

375 Christian and Muslim, lay, clergy and sheikhs attended the event. The MECC General Secretary welcomed the esteemed Christian and Muslim panelists who highlighted the importance and the crucial roles of the different spheres of Christian Muslim encounters in promoting mutual respect, cooperation and coexistence in Egypt.



A picture of the panelists and the audience

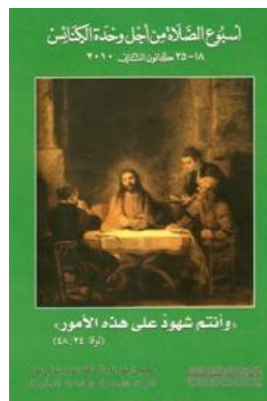
Different viewpoints were exposed in an atmosphere of honesty and respect. The panelists were delighted to see that the MECC has proven to be an oasis of dialogue and trust building in Egypt and the Arab world.

This event is one in a series of initiatives undertaken the Christian Muslim youth follow up committee that was established as a result of the interfaith conference that was held in Egypt in August 2009 under the theme: “Young Peace Makers”. The MECC office in Cairo continues to provide accompaniment for that committee and logistical support for its activities.

The Week of prayer for the Unity of the Christians:

The MECC organized the week of prayer for the unity of the Christians from 18- 24 January 2010. The Theme for this Year was:

“And you were Witnesses of These Things” (Luke 24:48)



This prayer booklet was published in Lebanon and Egypt as an in-kind church contribution. Moreover, an electronic version of it was sent to all the heads of the churches and the members of the Executive Committee.

Series of events took place in the different Middle Eastern countries particularly in Lebanon and Egypt.

In Lebanon, the opening ceremony took place at the Armenian Evangelical Church in Beirut in the presence of the heads of the churches in Lebanon or their representatives. There were different events taking place in different parts of the country. Rev. Father Gabi Hashem the Faith and Unity director gave a key not speech on the horizons of the Christian Unity. Moreover, there were choir recitals, documentaries and youth and students events. The closing session was hosted by the Unity monastery of the Clarissin nuns in Yarze.

In Egypt, the agenda was not less diverse and inspiring. The opening ceremony was held at the St. Joseph Latin Church in Egypt and was marked by an overwhelming presence of church leaders and lay. There were daily prayers and ceremony hosted by all the Christian families in Egypt. Nevertheless, the Closing session was marked by the presence of H.H. Pope Shenouda III and thousands of believers who usually attend his Wednesday open meeting.

Finally, there is a word of gratitude to Nour-sat, Sat 7, Agapi and CTV for their generous satellite coverage of the various events of the week of prayer.

Partiarch Sabbah visits the MECC Headquarters:

The Latin Emeritus Patriarch of the Latin Church in the Holy Land, Michel Sabbah accompanied by WCC staff Mr. Michel Nseir and Youssef Daher visited the MECC headquarters in Beirut on February 17. They met with its General Secretariat and senior staff. In the meeting His Beatitude Sabbah presented the Kairos Palestine document and steps that MECC can take to assist in spreading that document and collecting public understanding and support.



H.B Sabbah with Mr. Saleh.

MECC is a board member of the NGOs Network in Lebanon:

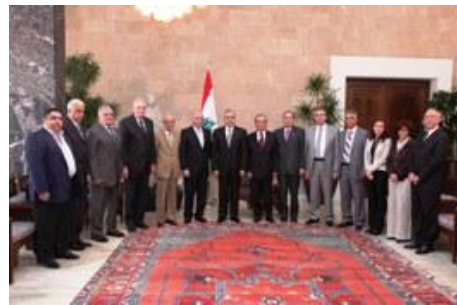
The MECC Associate General Secretary and ICNDR director, Mr. Elias El-Halabi, was elected board member of the NGO's Network and coordinator of economical and social committee.

The NGOs Network is a cluster of 18 prominent Christian, Muslim and secular NGOs who have been playing a very crucial role in the support,

relief and development work in Lebanon during and after the Lebanese civil war. The NGO network is engaged in a series of meeting with the high Lebanese officials to introduction its plan of action. Lately they met with the president of the Lebanese republic and the minister of social affairs.



The Elected board members



The Board with H.E the president

Partners visting MECC and ICNDR :

On March 15, Rev. Peter Johanson from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Miss Outi Behm from the Fin Church aid and Miss. Sarah Adams from the Mennonite Central Committee visited the MECC headquarters and met with the General Secretariat and the senior staff. Then there were two meeting with ICNDR director and staff team. Finally the partners joined the Task force meeting which focused partly on the MECC strategic study plan and the latest update on the Council's state of affairs.

Prison Ministry Workshop

Middle East Council of Churches MECC Diakonia & Social Justice Unit together with International Center for Migration Policy Development ICMPD – STREDECA organized a three days training workshop from 22 – 24 March 2010 at Hotel Commodore for General Security and Lebanese Internal Security Forces officers based in detention centers and prisons in Lebanon.

35 officers participated in the workshop. Opening words were addressed by ICMPD Program Manager on Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration Mr. Julien Simon and MECC Director of Diakonia & Social Justice Unit Ms. Seta Hadesian.

The session was run by Ms. Elisabeth Zakharia Sioufi, chairperson of MECC Diakonia & Social Justice Local Committee.

Present were UNHCR Regional Representative in Lebanon Mr. Jean Paul Cavalier, ICMPD Regional Director Mr. Abdel Al Mawla El Solh, MECC General Secretary Mr. Guirgis Saleh, Director of STREDECA project in Vienna Mr. Rami Bathiech, Attache of European Union Delegation in Lebanon Ms. Maria Sanchez and representative of General Security

Director General Waffic Jezzini Lieutenant Fady Malak and representative of Internal Security Forces General Ashraf Riffi, and lieutenants and colonels.

The training workshop is run by the Director of Prison Studies at King's College – London, Prof. Rob Allen, specifically invited for this training from United Kingdom.

Resource persons who brought their additional information were Ms. Elisabeth Zakharia Syoufi, lawyer and chairperson of MECC Diakonia & Social Justice Local Committee and Mr. Nidal El Jurdi, Program Officer at Office of High Commissioner for human rights.

The book on **Human Rights Perspective in Prison Management** was distributed to all participants

Publication of children's storybook on Children's Rights: "*Beyond the Silence*".

It is very lamentable that many children are still deprived of opportunities to pursue their dreams. They are mainly refugees, displaced and uprooted children longing for family, home and a dream for the future. While in reality life for them is a nightmare! instead of a safe, happy and promising life, millions of children continue to endure an existence of hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and abuse.

In spite of the numerous international conventions and protocols on the protection of children, they continue to suffer widespread abuses and sexual exploitations, including child prostitution and child pornography. Millions of children are subjected to forced labor and armed conflicts under oppressive and dangerous conditions. They have no hope for schooling and playing. Several million children have also been orphaned or separated from their parents. Many of them are victims of abuse and neglect. Children account for one half of the millions refugees worldwide. They also account for the half of the millions internally displaced persons in the world. In both developed and developing countries, children are in increasing numbers falling victim to drug abuse which constitutes a serious threat to their health, safety and well-being.

MECC Diakonia and Social Justice Unit in the mandate of protecting and advocating the rights of children and their future respond with advocacy and awareness raising activities. DSJ embarked on publishing the rights of the children through a story and illustrations to convey the misery children undergo and the rights they are entitled to, addressed to children and the public at large.

Beyond the silence, is the story of a refugee child telling her life through a drama presenting the lives of many other refugee children suffering from abuse, exploitation, armed conflict, violence, poverty and misery. The book is 72 illustrated and colorful **pages**. Written in English and Arabic. It will be launched at World Refugee Day in June.

Upcoming Events:

- The MECC Executive Committee meeting:
The MECC Executive Committee will have its annual regular meeting in Amman on 20 February 2010.

- The MECC/ ICNDR partners meeting:
The MECC will hold its partners meeting on April 28 at National Evangelical Church in Beirut. The next day will be dedicated to ICNDR.

For more information please contact us on:

Middle East Council of Churches, Beirut office:
mecc@cyberia.net.lb