



MECC News Brief

Issue October – December 2009

Editorial Note:

The Middle East Council of Churches has been under huge financial and administrative constraints. Nonetheless, the Council strived to remain active and to honor the commitments to the partners. During the partners meeting that took place in Beirut October 26, 2009, the partners have expressed their will to support future MECC programs and to accompany the MECC strategic process that will be initiated in 2010 with the help of a professional external consultant.

As a sign of ownership and active involvement in addressing the financial crisis, Metropolitan Boulos Matar, one of the four MECC presidents, hosted a fundraising dinner at his Bishopric. The dinner was an opportunity to express moral and financial solidarity with the MECC. Similar initiative will take place in the other Middle Eastern countries.

As we turn the last pages of 2009, we are looking forward to a blessed and fruitful year with the support of all who believe in the importance of joint Christian witness in the Middle East region.

MECC General Secretary meets the Catholic Patriarchs in Lebanon during their meeting on 2009/10/7:

Upon the invitation of Father Khalil Alwan, the General Secretary of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs, Mr. Guirges Saleh the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches attended on 5/10/2009 the opening of ceremony of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the Catholic Patriarchs in the monastery of Our Lady of Al-Sharfi , the residence of the Syrian Catholic Patriarch.

On 7/10/2009 Mr. Saleh presented to the Patriarchs a report on the Council latest development during the period from November 2008 until October 2009 including the decisions of the two executive committee meeting that were held on 15/1 and 15/7/2009. He presented the new structure that was adopted by the Executive Committee until 2011. During that time a strategic analysis of the MECC will be launched and it will yield final structure that will be adopted in 2011 MECC General Assembly.

The General Secretary also informed them that the partners are

looking forward to greater financial support of the Council by the member churches as a sign of Ownership.

Ms. Alexa Abi Habib, the MECC Justice Peace and Human Rights program director accompanied the MECC General Secretary, who shared afterwards with the Patriarchs a report on the follow-up by the JPHR Program of the project that came in response to a recommendation from the Heads of Churches to establish an observatory and a Forum for human rights in the Middle East, and which was approved by the Executive Committee in the Council. The report reflected the phases of implementation and the obstacles which delayed the mechanisms of implementation. The report also justified the reasons that were behind the delay in launching the Monitor.

The Seventh Interfaith Dialogue conference in Doha:

Under the title:” The Human Solidarity”, the Doha International Center for Inter-religious Dialogue held its seventh annual conference on 20-21 October 2009. The MECC General Secretary was invited to this meeting and was appointed reporter for the working groups on economic solidarity and the analysis of the religious causes of economic crisis and its implications.

The MECC Executive Committee member Syrian Orthodox Archbishop George Saliba of Mount Lebanon delivered a lecture on “Solidarity and integration in the face of natural disasters and famines in the world from a religious perspective”.

The MECC Honorary President Bishop John Qolta delivered a lecture on “The proposed religious solutions to defend the holy places”. The Council has been actively participated in these conferences and has contributed with several papers since the first conference.



Mr. Saleh, Archbishop Saliba with the Ex-Sudanese president Suar El Dhahab, Chairperson of the International Islamic Forum for dialogue and Dr. Hamid El-Rifai.

The deans of the theological seminaries in the Middle East convene at Saint Ephrem Monastery – Syria :

The Association of the Theological Institutes in the Middle East (ATIME) held its annual conference at St. Ephrem Syrian Orthodox Monastery in Maarrat Sednaya during the period from 29/10-31/10/2009. His Holiness Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for Syrian Orthodox hosted this meeting that was attended by representatives of the deans of the theological seminaries members of ATIME in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon. The meeting was chaired by Bishop Matthias the current president. Rev. Dr. Majdi Siddiq, the ATIME Executive Secretary and Mr. Guirges Saleh the MECC General Secretary participated in this meeting. During the meeting the participants discussed the joint activities and the athletic and cultural events planned for next year in addition to the meeting of professors. The Deans met with His Holiness Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas and the next meeting will be hosted by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III at the Saint Mark Center, Nasr City- Cairo from 28/10 till 30/10/2010.



The Secretary-General and the MECC Cairo office staff with His Holiness Pope Shenouda III:

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria, Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, and Honorary President of the Council received Mr. Guirges Saleh and the MECC Cairo office staff on Wednesday November 25, 2009, to congratulate him on the thirty-eighth anniversary of his enthronement. His Holiness expressed his appreciation for the gesture in front of thousands attendees for his Wednesday open meeting



The Christmas Greetings:

The MECC General Secretary, Mr. Guirges Saleh, accompanied H.H. Pope Shenouda III in his visits to greet the heads of Churches in Egypt in the occasion of Christmas. He visited H.H. Theodoros II, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and H. B. Antonios I Naguib, the Coptic Catholic Patriarch.



Christian Muslim follow up meeting in Cairo:

The MECC General Secretariat organized on December 18, 2009 a follow up meeting for the Christian Muslim dialogue Youth conference that was organized in Cairo in August 2009 under the theme “Young Peace makers”. 30 Muslim and Christian youth attended the meeting that took place at the MECC office In Cairo. Mr. Shaher Louka from MECC Cairo provided the logistical support and communication infrastructure for that meeting. A follow up committee was formed and a plan of action for 2010 was drawn of a SWOT analysis that was moderated by the MECC Associate general secretary Mr. Elias EI-Halabi.

The next follow up meeting is scheduled on January 15, 2010.



The Seventh Annual Meeting of Christian Nurses in Cairo:

The Cairo office to the Middle East Council of Churches organized the seventh annual conference for female nursing practitioners in Egypt who meet for three full days in Qalyoub - Egypt from 15 to 18 October 2009. Hundred participants coming from all governorates (Cairo - Alexandria - Tanta - Banha - Menouf - Ismailia - Port Said - Qalyubia - Giza - Beni Suef - Minya - Assiut - Sohag - Aswan) attended the meeting was attended. Dr. Anton Khalil Jamal opened the conference and welcomed the participants. Then the MECC General Secretary-General made the opening speech and introduced the council's departments and activities. He stressed that the mission of the council is to company and strengthen the bonds of love among all the four family of the four churches in Egypt and the Middle East. He concluded by wishes for the success of this Conference. Dr. Samia Ezzat Farag, the women coordinator -MECC Cairo Office appreciated the presence of nurses from various hospitals and medical centers throughout the republic, stated that the aim of that conference was to raise the efficiency of nursing in the church owned hospitals and medical centers.



Obstacles facing Ecumenism in Egypt:

On December 7, 2009 Bishop Mounir Hanna hosted at the Cathedral of All Saints Episcopal Church – Zamalek, a meeting to discuss the obstacles facing the ecumenical work in Egypt. Mr. Guirges Saleh the MECC General Secretary, Mr. Shafer Luke, Mr. Zaghloul, Fouad and the members of the

local Committee of the week of prayer for the unity of Christians in Egypt in addition to representatives of various churches. His Excellency the Ambassador of Vatican in Egypt was the guest of honor of that meeting. It is important to note that this committee meets every month and the Council is the umbrella ecumenical work, which in Egypt.



"The role of women in the progress of the nations"

"The role of women in the progress of the nations" was the theme of the meeting that was organized by the MECC Cairo office on Friday, November 6, 2009 at the Hall of the Greek Orthodox Youth Club in Heliopolis - Cairo – Egypt. The aim of the meeting was to empower women and to stimulate female participation in the society. The meeting was attended by 50 male and female and was led by Dr. Nadine Nakkash who is a member of the local Women's Committee of the MECC in Egypt.

Dr. Samia Ezzat from Middle East Council Churches of Cairo Office welcomed the participants and gave a brief overview of the Middle East Council of Churches and its different programs.



The Year of European Churches Responding to Migration.

Global Ecumenical Network on Migration-GENM & the Churches' Commission on Migrants' in Europe – CCME together organized a hearing on 24 -27 of November in Budapest to launch the Year of European Churches Responding to Migration.

The meeting was hosted by the Reformed Church of Hungary and took place at the Best Western Hotel – Hungary. Around 60 church representatives from Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, Pacific, Asia and the Middle East participated in the hearing. MECC Diakonia and Social Justice Director Mrs. Seta Hadeshian participated in the hearing representing MECC in the GENM (regional reports on Migration), chaired a session and presented the Migration issues in the Middle East.

The calendar of events included reflections on Migration and new definition on the role of churches, their mission, goal and diaconal response to migration issues. The aim of the of the Year on Migration 2010 is to make more visible churches engagement for communities and societies, their service to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and in migration issues in general.

The second part of the meeting was dedicated to the Hearing whereby different representatives from Europe conveyed their churches response to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as church's handicaps and limitations in their response to migrant populations.

The Global Forum on Migration and Development ,Civil Society Days

The Third Annual Global Forum on Migration and Development took place in Athens, Greece from 1 – 3 November 2009, and was hosted by the Alexander Onassis Foundation.

The Greek President Karolos Papoulias, Greek and Foreign legislators, immigration experts, analysts and advocates and journalists from around the world attended the Forum in addition to around 311 civil society and Migration and Refugee organization.

The Forum addressed Issues mainstreaming migration in development, engaging diaspora and migrants in development policies and addressing the root causes of migration through development. The forum provided the opportunity to initiate a conversation with the civil society to achieve the right balance between combating illegal immigrations and upholding the right of migrants and asylum seekers in residing countries.

The interface with Government officials and representatives of the Forum, took place after the Round tables ended and the reports were discussed in a plenary. The proposed resolutions at the roundtables were reported to the government officials who are supposed to report back to their own governments for further discussions and change in their migration policies. Among the governments officials present were the US and Australian government representatives.

The MECC Diakonia and Social Justice Unit director, Mrs. Seta Hadeshian represented both WCC Global Ecumenical Network and MECC in this forum.

The UN/WCC Advocacy Week, New York – USA

The UN Advocacy Week (UNAW) was held in UN Church Center in New York from 16-20 November 2009 and was organized by WCC-UN Liaison office in New York. 80 participants from around the globe convened to deepen the advocacy implications of issues addressed by churches and the World Council of Churches. This Year's theme focused on Climate Displaced peoples, indigenous peoples, their rights and the specific situation of Colombia.

The Ecumenical dimension concentrated on the role and responsibilities of the churches in advocating on regional & global level, individually and collectively to raise awareness among politicians and world rulers and bring about changes at UN level. The conference broke out into regional and thematic groups to discuss and reflect and proposed ideas for WCC to pursue in the coming years.

More than 12 mission visits were organized by WCC Liaison office to visit state representatives at UN to convey the concerns of the churches on climate change and climate displaced peoples, the expectations of the churches from states in resuming their responsibilities to minimize emissions, pollution and destruction of the nature, in protecting the mother earth and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples. It is expected that churches all over the world will echo in ringing their bells 350 times as a sign of collective protest, alarm and awareness raising.

The MECC Diakonia & Social Justice Unit Director Mrs. Seta Hadeshian participated in the UN Advocacy Week meeting representing the Middle East.

The Draft Framework for Theological Statement, Core Group on Just and Inclusive Communities

The Just and Inclusive Communities Core group met in Nagpur, India at the NCCI campus from December 10-14th, 2009 to consider the theme of Hospitality, Inclusion and Justice: A theological reflection in response to old and new forms of discrimination and exclusion. This consultation is the third of a series of gathering of theologians and activists representing the areas of work associated with the JIC initiatives, was hosted by the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). The MECC Diakonia & Social Justice Director Mrs. Seta Hadeshian participated in this meeting representing WCC GENM Meeting and MECC.

At this meeting, the Global Ecumenical Migrants Network became "officially" a part of the JIC family. The focus of the gathering was on understanding more fully the reality of exclusion as a result of the operation of the caste system in India and more particularly the struggle of the Dalits for basic human rights and dignity.

In considering the theme, the group wondered out loud about the appropriateness of the term "Hospitality" in the theme. It was recognized that the term 'hospitality' needed to be redefined from the perspective of

Justice and not just from the perspective of welcome and the sharing of resources. The meeting ended with proposed themes for the Global platform for theological reflections for the year 2010 – 2012.

Towards the Promotion of the UN resolution 1325 Implementation in the Middle East region:

With the aim to discuss and endorse the regional Strategy drafted by the Norwegian Church Aid in the regional meeting in Amman (3-5 July 2009), the Director of MECC Justice, Peace and Human Rights Ms. Alexa Abi-Habib brought together few women NGOs, civil society organizations working in the fields of human rights and peace in the Center of Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering on September 5, 2009.

Ms. Alexa Abi-Habib will serve as a reference member of NCA group on the implementation of the UN Resolution 1325.

Athletic Day for Theological seminaries:

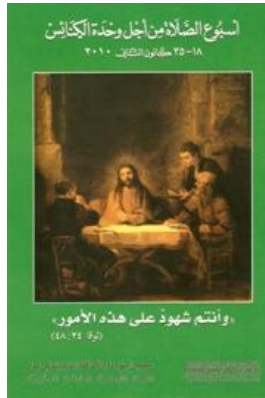
250 students affiliated to Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical seminaries in Egypt met on November 21, 2009 at the human and theological faculty in Al-Maadi, Cairo. The Ecumenical athletic day was under the theme: "I am the Vineyard and you are the branches". This event was part of the ATIME program that aims at providing ecumenical formation for the future church ministers.

Mr. Guirges Saleh, the MECC General Secretary along with Rev. Dr. Magdi Seddik, the ATIME Executive Secretary and the two Associate Executive secretaries Dr. Rasmi Abdel-Malak and Father Andraos Fahmi attended the opening session.



Upcoming Events:

- The Week of prayer for the Unity of the Christians:
The MECC will organize the week of prayer for the unity of the Christians from 18- 24 January 2010.



The Theme for this Year is:
“*And you were Witnesses of These Things*” (Luke 24:48)

- The MECC Executive Committee meeting:
The MECC Executive Committee will have its annual regular meeting in Amman 23-24 February 2010.
- The Christian Muslim Encounters : a Focus on Lebanon:
The MECC in collaboration with the UNDP will launch a joint publication entitled: “*The Christian Muslim Encounters: a Focus on Lebanon*” in March 2010. The book is edited by Mr. Elias El-Halabi.

For more information please contact us on:

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