



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

The Middle East Council of Churches

## DIAKONIA DEPARTMENT- SERVICE IN DIGNITY

Rescue Syria Update - 14

April 20<sup>th</sup> 2023



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The Middle East Council of Churches

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"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people." Ephesians 6:7

## ***The Agony of Syria's Earthquake... how long will it last?***

*A glimpse of hope that would overcome the darkness of many years of struggle, is what Syrians aspire for. Two months have passed since Syria was rocked by two deadly earthquakes in the early hours of 6 February, followed by almost 14,000 aftershocks. It was so powerful that it was described as "the earthquake of the century," and it seems that its repercussions will be long-lasting. To this day, many residents of Aleppo, Lattakia, and Jableh are still caught in the vortex of displacement after the earthquake tore apart their lives.*

*In 2011, a war began in Syria and left behind a worsening humanitarian crisis classified as the largest since World War II. In 2023, the earthquake described as "the earthquake of the century" struck a wounded homeland and people who have suffered repeated severe blows until they were no longer able to withstand a new one. Many residents of the cities that were hit by the earthquake lost their homes. Some of them took refuge at a relative house. Others remained at the church hall or Mosque hall, while others insisted on returning to their homes despite the cracks.*

*Um Ali (55 years old), whose story topped social media sites and news agencies, is one of many stories that reflect the harsh reality experienced by the people of Aleppo, Lattakia, and Jableh. Um Ali refused to leave her house despite the fact that the whole exterior facade has collapsed due to the earthquake, making it an open-air shelter. She says: "Nothing can get me out of my home except death. Then I will go straight to my grave... We used to live a life of wealth and dignity, but the war changed our circumstances..."*

*After two months, the earthquake disaster nearly disappeared from the news headlines, but it still dominates the lives of those who still do not have a place to resort to. Some preferred to stay in mosques and churches, some remained under tents, and some decided to stay in their homes despite knowing that they could collapse over their heads at any moment.*

*How long will the bad memories haunt Syrians? How long will the world stand silent about the repeated pains and wounds that the unjust economic sanctions are exacerbating? How long will innocent people keep suffering?*

## **Highlights**

According to the National Earthquake Centre, the stations of the National Seismological Center recorded 15 tremors of up to 4.4 on the Richter scale during the day from Friday the 14th to Sunday the 16th of April.<sup>1</sup>

- While the number of collective shelters has decreased since the earthquakes struck, there are still an estimated 205 collective shelters housing people affected by the earthquakes across Syria. At least 2,299 lightly damaged schools or 78 per cent, have reopened in Aleppo, Lattakia, Tartous, Hama, Homs and Idlib Governorates since the earthquakes struck, with attendance rates improving significantly in reopened schools to over 95 per cent on average.<sup>2</sup>

- Food prices have reportedly surged between 30 and 100 percent during Ramadan, further depressing Syrian purchasing power.

- In Syria, where 12 years of civil war had already taken a huge toll on the economy and labour market, ILO estimated that about 170,000 workers have lost their jobs as a result of the earthquakes. This has directly affected around 154,000 households and more than 725,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

- Around 35,000 micros, small and medium-sized enterprises have also been affected. This temporary "dis-employment" has led to total labour income losses equivalent to at least \$5.7 million a month.

[1] Facebook, Lattakia. Government

[2] OCHA, 13 April

[3] UN News

- Increasing numbers of child labour cases and children dropping out of school lead to additional child protection concerns.
- The high number of people who lost their livelihoods due to the earthquake exacerbates both short-term and longer-term protection risks.
- The need for child protection and GBV services continues to be high in the regions directly affected by the earthquake. Two months into the response, affected women, men, boys, and girls are still living in stressful situations.
- There remain significant gaps in the capacities of frontline service providers on safe referrals, GBV concepts, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and specialized protection areas. There is a need to increase the number of qualified case managers with GBV, CP and PSS expertise.
- In Aleppo, Families have been moved from emergency shelters to 17 schools selected as mid-term shelters. The eviction of people who are unable to provide structural damage assessment documentation has been reported and is a concern, especially given obstacles to timely access to the relevant documentation.
- Local authorities have requested humanitarian actors in Aleppo to stop delivering assistance in collective shelters by the end of the evacuation process scheduled on 13 April 2023 and have encouraged the re-direction of aid to host communities and returnees.<sup>4</sup>

## Challenges

- The designation of some shelters as permanent or temporary has not yet been fully clarified. This uncertainty creates additional stress and anxiety for the affected population. High-level advocacy continues to be a need, especially as many humanitarian actors are hesitant to provide medium to long-term support, including installing adequate facilities and lighting, pending a final list of shelters.
- In Aleppo, the ongoing evacuation of collective shelters and the need for weekly approvals for interventions restricted the delivery of assistance in some of the existing shelters in the last period.<sup>5</sup>



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[4] Protection Cluster-UNHCR, 14 April

[5] Protection Cluster-UNHCR, 14 April

# MECC intervention in response to the Earthquake:

## A- Reinforcements of affected buildings

The engineering team in Aleppo continues its mission to assess the structural status of affected buildings. Out of the target to assess 1200 buildings, 1170 buildings have been assessed to date to identify the number of buildings that need reinforcement. While acknowledging the required procedures to get the reinforcement license from the related authorities in Aleppo, MECC is reviewing the finished studies of some buildings prior to finalizing the tender books to get technical and financial offers to proceed with the first batch of buildings. In parallel of getting the license of the already selected buildings, the study of other selected buildings is in process under project batch 2.



One of the building under assessment by MECC technical team



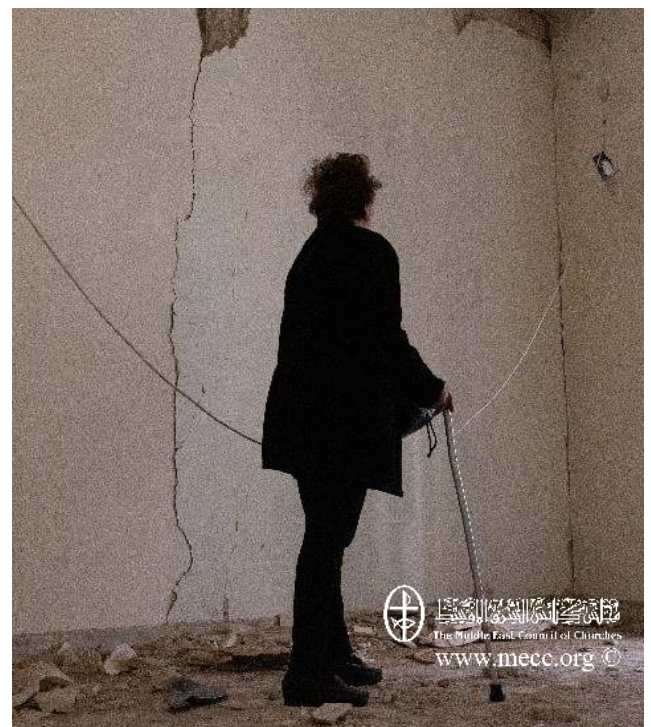
Engineers technical team during its assessment mission



Assessing the apartments in each building to examine any cracks or damage

## Testimony

J (66 years old) is a resident of the Baghdad Station neighborhood in Aleppo whose homes were damaged by the earthquake. Said: "I and my sister survived the earthquake horror, just as we previously survived the harsh war that we lived in Aleppo, where rocket shells were falling almost daily over our heads... We were given a second chance to live, but we were not able to keep the house we inherited from our parents and we do not have any other shelter. We suddenly found ourselves on the streets, as we cannot afford to buy another house. My sister works as a sales representative, and her modest salary is our only income. The Armenian Catholic community provided us with an alternative rental home for a limited period of time. Engineers from the Relief Committee visited us and assessed the damage of our house... My sister and I are waiting impatiently for the day we can return to our home because rental assistance is temporary and this means that one day we will have to secure the rent on our own, which is very difficult for us."





The basement of the building in Midan needs reinforcement to ensure safety to all residents

R (43 years old) is a resident of the Midan neighborhood in Aleppo whose homes were damaged by the earthquake. Said: "I work in aluminum carpentry and I support my children (8 years and 16 years old), my wife, and myself with the low salary income that I earn from my work. My house in the Midan neighborhood in Aleppo got cracked due to the earthquake, but I cannot leave it because I cannot afford to pay high-cost rent, so I stayed at my house with my family. Engineers from the Relief Committee in Aleppo visited our apartment and examined the cracks in it and in the whole building. They told us that the cracks in our apartment are not

dangerous, but the cracks in the basement of the building are dangerous, and in case another earthquake stroke Aleppo, the whole building will collapse. We need help to repair the cracks and reinforce the basement to protect the entire building, as many families who live in this building have nowhere else to go... It is very difficult to buy a house in these difficult economic conditions that our country is going through due to the long war it experienced, and we are all unable to save a single penny from the money we earn from our work, but in fact, we find it hard to make ends meet".

**B : Distribution of lifesaving items:**

To date, MECC has distributed 8589 food baskets, 3339 hygiene kits, 500 kits child protection tools and 500 blankets. Distribution activity has continued in Aleppo while preparation of distribution of life saving kits in the coastal area and central Syria is in its final stages. Under the health component, MECC is preparing the distribution of medicines to many patients in different targeted areas. Coordination with local Ecumenical relief committee continues on a weekly basis to update information of beneficiaries and share data among all actors on the ground.



# Video Reports :

click on picture to access the videos



**1- Syria Is in Distress Due to the Earthquake that Hit It**  
Video - Safir Salim Describes the Situation in the Salesian Church in Aleppo



**2- Moments of Terror Following the Earthquake that Struck Syria**  
Video - Georges Batikha Survives the Disaster and Highlights the Urgent Needs



**3- Searching for Hope Following the Earthquake that Hit Syria**  
Video - Rogina Makhoul Describes the Fear of the Afflicted Families and Children



**4- An Interview with His Eminence Ephraim Maalouli, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, Alexandretta and Dependencies, after the Earthquake that Struck Syria**



**5- A New Baby Born in Earthquake Rubble**  
Mohamad Bitar Explains the Difficult Situations He Passed Through with His Family



**6- In Seconds... Everything Changed**  
Manal Bitar Reports the First Moments of Terror



6 - Interview with His Eminence Archbishop Mor Boutros Kassis Following the Earthquake that Shook the North of the Antiochian Levant



7 - Syria is Still Crying Out in Pain After the Earthquake that Struck the North of the Antiochian Levant  
A Survivor Reports the Bitter Situations She Passed Through Following the

# Photo Albums :

click on picture to access the albums



Album 1- The Scenes of Destructions in Syria  
In Some Photos Taken by MECC



Album 2- Difficult Humanitarian Conditions in Syria  
New Photos Shows the Massive Disaster



Album 3- Photos from the Heart of the Tragedy in Syria



Album 4- Photos Showing the Bitter Humanitarian Situations in Syria