



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

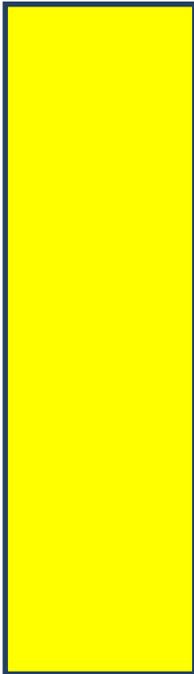
The Middle East Council of Churches

Head Office

Beirut, Lebanon. P.O. Box 11-5376

Tel: +961 1 353938 / Fax: +961 1 344896

info@mecc.org / www.mecc.org



MIDDLE EAST OVERVIEW

February 2019



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1. BACKGROUND

During the month of February, the Polish city Warsaw and Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt, saw major conferences that focused on issues relating to the Middle East. Despite the fact that one of the Warsaw summit's main goals was to focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the conference ignored, for the most part, the socio-economic challenges Palestine and the rest of the Middle East face in the wake of regional struggles. The summit only seemed as a materialization of power politics and a struggle between major powers in the Middle East region. While the gathering was beneficial for its attendees in solidifying their unity, the meeting ignored the plight of the Middle East societies and the ramifications that extend from the hostility towards one nation. As for the EU-Arab summit in Egypt, which witnessed a massive diplomatic presence, mainly focused on ways of enhancing cooperation between the EU and Arab nations, as a way to challenge other major powers competing over the region, again giving little attention to issues such as migration, terrorism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Egypt

- Egyptian official currency exchange rate: 17.5014 EG/USD¹
- Egypt's GDP growth rate is expected to be 5.5 percent in 2019².
- Unemployment rate has dropped by 1.1% reaching an 8.9% by the end of 2018³.
- Minister of Petroleum Tarek el-Molla claimed that Egypt is working on completing a new oil and gas contract to attract more foreign investment other than the \$10 billion already invested in the energy field this year⁴.
- Egypt's inflation rate increases reaching 12.2% in January according to a study done by CAPMAS⁵.
- IMF gave Egypt 2 billion US dollars as the fifth installment of a 12-billion-dollar loan to support the country's economic reform program⁶.
- A bomb exploded next to a mosque in Cairo's district of Giza on the 15th of February, maiming three people. Traffic to the area was diverted elsewhere as security officials feared another attack on civilian concentrations. Consequently, another bomb was detonated near Al Azhar mosque on the 18th killing three wounding civilians.⁷
- President Sisi and German Chancellor Merkel met in Munich on the 16th of February to discuss bilateral relations. The meeting is seen as a step forward for Egypt as Germany is one of the country's major trade and investment partners⁸.
- Egypt hosted the first ever EU-Arab league summit which is viewed to enhance cooperation on the economic and security front between the EU and Arab countries.⁹

¹ <http://www.cbe.org.eg/en/EconomicResearch/Statistics/Pages/ExchangeRatesListing.aspx>

² Albawaba, February 13, 2019, <https://www.albawaba.com/business/egypt%E2%80%99s-gdp-rises-55-percent-foreign-cash-inflows-exceeds-163-billion-3-years-1252228>

³ Egypt independent, February 15, 2019, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/egypts-unemployment-rate-falls-to-8-9-capmas/>

⁴ Salma El Wardany, Bloomberg Magazine, February 11, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-11/egypt-dangles-incentives-to-attract-more-oil-and-gas-investors>

⁵ Middle East Monitor, February 11, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190211-egypt-inflation-rates-increase-again-reaching-12-2-per-cent/>

⁶ MAHMOUD FOULY, February 14, 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/international/imf-official-hails-egypts-economic-reform-measures-19296813>

⁷ News 24, Feb 16, 2019 <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/egypt-official-home-made-bomb-explodes-near-mosque-3-hurt-20190216>

⁸ Egypt Today, Feb 16, 2019, <http://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/64763/Bilateral-talks-between-Sisi-and-Merkel-in-Munich>

⁹ Mahmoud Mourad, Reuters, Feb 24, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-arabs/arab-league-eu-seek-synchrony-on-regional-crises-in-first-summit-idUSKCN1QDOUZ>



Jordan

- Jordanian official currency value: 1.428 USD¹⁰
- Unemployment rate, by the end of 2018, has been recorded to 18.6%.
- In February, Jordan has been awarded an economic freedom score of 66.5, placing it 53rd globally in the 2019 index, launched by the Heritage Foundation think tank.
- GDP growth rate has been recorded to be 2.3%.¹¹
- The 2019 London Initiative, which took place on the 28th of February, aimed to place Jordan's economy on a sustainable growth trajectory. Strengthening Jordan's economy, ensuring jobs and growth for everyone, including women, youth and refugees, and securing long-term stability and prosperity, was part of the talks¹².
- A railway that will connect Aqaba with a future dry port in Jordan's Ma'an governorate, is one of Jordan and Saudi Arabia's attempts to enhance economic cooperation. Both countries will be investing 705 million USD for the sake of the project¹³.

Iraq

- Iraqi official currency exchange rate: 531 Dinar /USD¹⁴
- According to the World Bank, GDP growth is estimated to be 6.2% in 2019 noting improvement even in non-oil sectors.¹⁵
- In a new report also by the World Bank, 17% of men in the country are unemployed while 27% women are without jobs¹⁶.
- The United Kingdom will be donating 30 million £, to help Iraq in building new hospitals, power plants, and schools.¹⁷

¹⁰ <http://statisticaldb.cbj.gov.jo/index?action=level4>

¹¹ Jordan Times, Feb 16, 2019, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-ranks-4th-region-economic-freedom-index-experts-outline-shortfalls>

¹² Relief Web, Feb 18, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-growth-opportunity-london-initiative-2019-how-ensure-inclusion-women-youth-and>

¹³ Arabian Business, Feb 11, 2019, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/transport/413021-saudi-arabia-jordan-to-invest-705m-in-aqaba-railway-project>

¹⁴ <http://www.cbiraq.org/DataValues.aspx?dtFrm=10/31/2003&dtTo=02/18/2019&tMId=175&dtformat=MMM,yyyy>

¹⁵ The Arab Weekly, Feb 17, 2019, <https://thearabweekly.com/us-sanctions-against-iran-could-prove-be-opportunity-iraq>

¹⁶ Arab News, Feb 17, 2019, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1453436/business-economy>

¹⁷ Independent, January 29, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-uk-iraq-30m-hospitals-schools-power-plants-alistair-burt-middle-east-minister-a8751421.html>



- In a first attempt to reform the oil sector, Iraq Oil Minister Thamer al-Ghadhban reshuffled certain deputy positions¹⁸.
- Iraq and Iran agreed to build a power plant in Iraq. According to Iran's Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, the facility is part of a long-term electricity agreement between the two countries.¹⁹
- Turkey claimed that it will be giving Iraq around 5 billion USD for the reconstruction of the country²⁰.

Lebanon

- Lebanon official currency exchange rate: 1507.5 LBP/ USD ²¹
- The nation's parliament on the 15th of February approves the formation of the new government. According to the PM Saad El Hariri, the government's main aim is to reform the economy and implement anti-corruption which are critical to unlock the funds pledged by CEDRE²².
- Despite the optimistic political atmosphere in the country, a number of political opposition parties and civil society organizations organized demonstrations. They cited the failure of previous governments to carry out promises, crack-down on corruption, and protect constitutional institutions.²³
- In protest of the recent increased electricity rationing, demonstrators used burning tires to block highways in Lebanon. It was reported that the electricity shortage was as a result of dwindling fuel reserves²⁴.
- The Al-Fanar Psychiatric Hospital was closed after arresting the hospital Director the Health Ministry Director of Medical Care. This move represents one step towards the reform of the Public Health sector which has been long-plagued with corruption²⁵.
- Lebanon refused to attend the Warsaw conference held mid-February²⁶.

¹⁸ Raya Jalabi, Reuters, Feb 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/iraq-oil/iraqs-oil-minister-reshuffles-upstream-gas-posts-in-ministry-idUSL5N20A39E>

¹⁹ Kurdistan 24, Feb 09, 2019, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/6fbc0e5e-6e96-4832-8e54-7c65f19536a1>

²⁰ Hurriyet Daily News, Feb 03, 2019, <http://www.hurriyetsdailynews.com/turkey-to-provide-5-billion-loan-to-iraq-cavusoglu-140976>

²¹ <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/tabs/index/6/289/Daily-Exchange-Rates.html>

²² Reuters, Feb 15, 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-lebanon-government/lebanon-parliament-approves-new-government-idUKKCN1Q42NP>

²³ Daily Star, Feb 12, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-12/476475-no-confidence-in-this-government-protest-staged-in-beirut.ashx>

²⁴ Daily Star, Feb 19, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-19/476940-protesters-block-south-beirut-highway-overnight-over-increased-electricity-cuts.ashx>

²⁵ Daily Star, Feb 21, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-21/477094-govt-knew-about-al-fanar-a-year-ago.ashx>

²⁶ Daily Star, Feb 15, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-15/476694-pompeo-regrets-lebanons-absence-from-warsaw-summit.ashx>



- Saudi Arabia lifted a 15-month travel ban to Lebanon, citing a stable security situation in the country. The move is expected to encourage other Gulf countries to do the same²⁷.
- The port of Tripoli will receive a loan of 86 million USD, which will allow it to purchase equipment, new technologies, and infrastructure. This move will allow it turn by 2022 into a strategic logistic location not only in Lebanon but also in the region²⁸.
- Prime Minister Saad Hariri, after holding a series of meeting with Europeans partners at the EU-Arab League Summit, claimed that European countries have renewed for the CEDRE conference held in April to bolster Lebanon's economy.²⁹
- Israel gave gas exploration licenses near Block 9, a disputed border area with Lebanon, exacerbating tensions between the two countries³⁰.

Palestine

- GDP growth has been roughly estimated to be 0.5%³¹.
- UK and Palestine signed an agreement to continue trade after the UK leaves the European Union. Also, the agreement is meant to simplify the trade process.³²
- In a report published by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, West Bank and the Gaza Strip continue to have limited productive capacities. Restriction on natural resources and limited movement of goods and people, is limiting the nation's productive captivity³³.
- The recurrent conflict and the downfall of the economy in the Gaza Strip has decreased the resilience of vulnerable families and their capacity to cope³⁴.
- 11.6% of people in the West Bank are food insecure³⁵.
- 68% of people in the Gaza Strip are food insecure³⁶.
- There were protests this month in Ramallah against the Palestinian President in response to the suspension of a law intended to protect the most economically vulnerable in Palestinian society.

²⁷ Daily Star, Feb 14, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-14/476620-riaydh-throws-open-door-for-gulf-tourism-to-lebanon.ashx>

²⁸ Xinhua, Feb 18, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/18/c_137831501.htm

²⁹ Daily Star, Feb 26, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-26/477481-hariri-eu-leaders-solidified-support-for-cedre-pledges.ashx>

³⁰ Daily Star, Feb 06, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-06/476032-israel-must-move-away-from-lebanons-block-9-berri.ashx>

³¹ <https://tradingeconomics.com/palestine/gdp-growth-annual>

³² Feb 18, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-palestinian-authority-sign-trade-continuity-agreement>

³³ Relief Web, Feb 11, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ca3263en.pdf>

³⁴ Relief Web, Feb 11, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ca3263en.pdf>

³⁵ Relief Web, Feb 11, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ca3263en.pdf>

³⁶ Relief Web, Feb 11, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ca3263en.pdf>



- Saudi King Salman reaffirmed that his country permanently stands by Palestine and its people's right to an independent state with east Jerusalem as its capital. This pledge came as a prelude to a possible United States-sponsored Israel-Palestine peace³⁷.

Syria

- Official Current Exchange Rate SP/USD: 437.5 SP/USD
- Due to the new western sanctions on Syria, civilians are finding it extremely difficult to obtain gas, fuel and diesel. Electricity outages are also increasing every month because of the lack of gas.
- The Central Bank of Syria is redoubling efforts to bring back funds deposited in Lebanese and other foreign banks, as US financial restrictions on the Syrian regime grow tighter³⁸.
- In order to forge a prompt diplomatic solution, the sides are determined to assist in launching the Syrian constitutional committee within the shortest timeframe possible. Russia, Iran and Turkey also value cooperation and coordination with all sides of the Syrian conflict and UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen³⁹.
- A series of violations (clashes and shelling) were made in the North West buffer zone between governmental forces and armed groups. The clashes took place in Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib and Hama. The violations have escalated from previous months and are leading to direct confrontations and heavy casualties on both sides⁴⁰.
- The Syrian Arab Republic is preparing to reopen their border-crossing with Iraq as the area around the city of Albukamal has been declared safe for the first time in years⁴¹.

³⁷ Arabian Business, Feb 12, 2019, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/413135-saudi-king-reaffirms-support-for-palestinian-state>

³⁸ Al-Monitor, Feb 15, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/02/syria-regime-central-bank-funds-deposits-lebanon.html>

³⁹ Daily Sabah, Feb 28, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/02/28/constitutional-committee-the-next-step-for-peace-settlement-in-syria>

⁴⁰ Sputnik News, Feb 27, 2019 <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201902281072816603-syria-ceasefire-violations-militants/>

⁴¹ Almasdar News, Feb 17, 2019, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syria-preparing-to-reopen-public-border-crossing-with-iraq-report/>



Cyprus

- Euro official currency value: 1.268 USD⁴²
- GDP in 2019, according to early February estimates, recorded a growth of 3.1%⁴³.
- The 'Aphrodite' gas agreement signed between Egypt and Cyprus is being accelerated since there are intentions by other companies and financial institutions to join into the deal⁴⁴.
- Inflation is expected to ease to 0.7% in 2019⁴⁵.
- Cyprus will set up a new credible insurance authority that will supervise the sector. This will be done by merging two already existing insurance authorities⁴⁶.
- Cyprus, Egypt, and Greece, during a trilateral meeting on the 11th of February, insured the three countries' determination to extract Gas no matter who opposes it⁴⁷.
- Turkey launches war games on the 27th of February over the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Mediterranean, increasing tensions within Cyprus⁴⁸.

3. THE REFUGEE SITUATION

Egypt

- Egypt is hosting approximately 280,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers predominantly from Iraq, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.
- The UNHCR in Egypt requires 104 million USD. As of February 6, 2019, the agency has received 4% of promised donations.
- The UNHCR using this budget will:
 - Undergo 150,000 primary health consultations
 - Send to 31,000 households multi-purpose cash grants
 - Provide 50,000 students in primary and secondary schools with education grants.
 - Provide 4500 Unaccompanied and supported children, with child protection services.
 - Grant 1,200 refugees and asylum seekers with legal support.

⁴² https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html

⁴³ Financial Mirror, January 31, 2019, <http://www.financialmirror.com/news-details.php?nid=36484>

⁴⁴ Financial Mirror, February 11, 2019, <http://www.financialmirror.com/news-details.php?nid=36514>

⁴⁵ Cyprus Mail, February 7, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/02/07/gdp-expected-to-grow-by-over-3-this-year/>

⁴⁶ Cyprus Mail, February 7, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/02/07/cyprus-to-set-up-a-single-insurance-and-pensions-supervisory-authority/>

⁴⁷ Star Tribune, February 11, 2019, <http://www.startribune.com/egypt-no-one-should-obstruct-use-of-east-med-resources/505663742/>

⁴⁸ Selcan Hacaoglu, February 13, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-13/turkish-war-games-set-for-three-seas-in-contest-over-gas-finds>



- Italy and the EU will be contributing 1,293,465 USD and 678,066 USD respectively. Also, the UN children fund will be allocating 56,000 USD⁴⁹.

Jordan

The UNHCR states that there are currently 671,551 registered refugees in Jordan as of the beginning of January. No update for the current month has been posted.

- The proportion of Syrian displaced people registered within the UHCR for January, are distributed as follows:
 - 197,084 in Amman Governorate (29.4 %)
 - 164,021 in Mafraq Governorate (24.4%)
 - 140,639 in Irbid Governorate (21%)
 - 96,951 in Zarqa Governorate (14.4%)
 - 19,402 in Balqa Governorate (2.9%)
 - 13,371 in Madaba Governorate (2%)
 - 9,896 in Jarash Governorate (1.5%)
 - 8,934 in Karak Governorate (1.3%)
 - 8,228 in Maan Governorate (1.2%)
 - 7,056 in Ajlun Governorate (1.1%)
 - 3,617 in Aqaba Governorate (0.5%)
 - 1,739 in Tafilah Governorate (0.3%)
- The Growth and Opportunity conference hosted in London on the 28th of February focused on ways to boost the Jordanian Economy to bear the burden of refugees.⁵⁰
- At the Warsaw summit held in February, the Jordanian foreign minister Ayman Safadi spoke about the ramifications of the decline in funding for the UNRWA. He highlighted that this change in policy is affecting the Palestinian refugees and the Jordanian economy as well⁵¹.
- In an attempt to assist Palestinian refugees in the wake of the US pull out, the Spanish embassy made a donation of 500,000 Euros. It comes in addition to the generous contribution of EUR 19.5 million pledged to the Agency by the Government of Spain in 2018⁵².

⁴⁹ <http://reporting.unhcr.org/egypt>

⁵⁰ Mina Aldroubi, The National, February 18, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/uk-minister-jordan-investment-conference-will-benefit-refugees-as-well-1.827315>

⁵¹ Jordan Times, Feb 14, 2019, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-urges-solutions-allow-return-refugees-warsaw-meeting>

⁵² UNRWA, January 31, 2019, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/features/spanish-embassy-funds-operation-costs-two-unrwa-health-centres>



Iraq

The UNHCR states that there are currently 252,451 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq as of the end of January.

- The proportion of displaced people registered within the UHCR for January, are distributed as follows:
 - 128,505 in Erbil (50.9%)
 - 88,447 in Dahuk (35%)
 - 32,341 in Sulaymaniyah (12.8%)
 - 1,102 in Anbar (0.4%)
 - 701 in Kirkuk (0.3%)
 - 500 in Ninewa (0.2%)
 - 855 in other regions (0.3%)
- As of 31 December 2018, 1,802,832 IDPs have been identified.⁵³
- The closure of an Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) camp in Kirkuk province was announced on the 9th of February by the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration, after it helped hundreds of displaced people back to their homes in neighboring Hawija city⁵⁴.
- 1,200 IDPs return to their areas in Diyala's Khanaqin⁵⁵.
- 1,000 IDPs return to liberated areas in Nineveh⁵⁶.
- As per the directives of H.H. Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, The Emirate's Representative in Al Dhafra Region, the ERC (Emirates Red Crescent) intensified its humanitarian efforts to help refugees in winter. As such, the ERC distributed winter aid to around 75,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq in Irbil and surrounding governorates⁵⁷.
- Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo made 7.6 million euros available for humanitarian aid in Iraq. Four million will go to the humanitarian fund for Iraq of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 1 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1 million to the World Food Program (WFP) and 1.6 million to Handicap International in support of the return of displaced people in Kirkuk⁵⁸.

⁵³ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

⁵⁴ Kurdistan 24, Feb 10, 2019, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/bc3f0766-4536-4d0c-b49f-94fdb88b80f0>

⁵⁵ Kurdistan 24, Feb 17, 2019, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/0218c61a-c397-4c09-88d9-d87f8cec8b69>

⁵⁶ Kurdistan 24, Feb 18, 2019 <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/bb41369b-7047-486b-8f40-3e87972a71b0>

⁵⁷ Relief Web, Feb 10, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/75000-refugees-kurdish-region-iraq-benefit-erc-winter-aid-appeal>

⁵⁸ Relief Web, Feb 19, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/alexander-de-croo-makes-76-million-euros-available-humanitarian-aid-iraq>



Lebanon

- Until January 2019, the LCRP have succeeded in receiving 1.4 billion USD that is spent on basic assistance, food security, education, health, water, livelihoods, protection, shelter, social stability and energy. No present update for the month of February, has been published. It is reported that there is still a gap of 1.28 billion USD which LCRP has not yet received.⁵⁹
- Minister of State for Refugee Affairs Saleh Gharib made a visit to Damascus to discuss the possible secure return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. His visit signals the new government's political approach in taking a pro-active return policy of refugees⁶⁰. Yet, the issue sparked controversy and friction with other political leaders who see the move is seen as not "safe and secure" for Syrians.
- An eviction notice was sent to refugee communities near the Litani River, as a result of poor management of the camps, and an anti-pollution campaign being implemented jointly by the Litani River Authority and the Industry Ministry. This forced refugees to evacuate their shelters on the 17th of February, leaving them without any homes.⁶¹
- In a Qatari sponsored initiative, humanitarian aid was allocated to 11,000 Syrian families living in the Aarsal area of Lebanon. 50 million USD were spared by the nation.⁶²
- To mark the end of the 8-month "Strengthening Psychological Support for Palestine Refugees from Lebanon and Palestinian Refugees from Syria" project, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) held a ceremony. Participants deemed the project a total success.⁶³
- Despite the US withdrawal from supporting the UNRWA, the agency will be able to provide life-saving hospitalization for elderly Palestine refugees in Lebanon through the funding received from Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF) for 2019⁶⁴.
- The Palestinians residing in Nahr el bared camp still suffer from bad housing. Till the present moment, only half of the camp's residents have had their houses rebuilt⁶⁵.

⁵⁹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67922>

⁶⁰ Leila Molona-Allen, Telegraph, Feb 20, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/02/20/lebanese-minister-visits-damascus-discuss-repatriation-refugees/>

⁶¹ Daily Star, Feb 19, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-19/476925-refugees-left-homeless-by-litani-anti-pollution-campaign.ashx>

⁶² Ali Murat Alhas, AA, Feb 17, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/qatar-delivers-aid-to-syrians-in-lebanons-arsal-region/1395063>

⁶³ Relief Web, Feb 14, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/end-project-strengthening-psychological-support-palestine-refugees-lebanon-funded-giz>

⁶⁴ Relief Web, Feb 03, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/through-support-lebanon-humanitarian-fund-taawon-and-unrwa-secure-sustainability-life>

⁶⁵ Sofia Amara, France 24, Feb 8, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190208-revisited-challenge-rebuilding-lebanon-nahr-al-bared-palestinian-refugee-camp-unrwa>



- Prime Minister Saad el Hariri met with UNRWA's General Director and the Chairman of the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee Hassan Mneimneh. Mr Saad el Hariri renewed his country's pledge in supporting the Palestinian cause⁶⁶.

Syria

- During the month of December 2018, the humanitarian community tracked 58,549 IDPs displacements across Syria. The largest IDPs movements of 33,163 IDPs were noticed in Idleb governorate, the great majority of which was internal displacement within Idleb governorate with about 31,000 IDPs, while about 4,600 IDPs were displaced east Idleb governorate to west Aleppo countryside. This displacement was due to active fire exchange between the GoS forces and the NSAGs along the Demilitarized Zone in east Idleb and northern Hama countryside where about 1,400 IDPs displaced from northern Hama communities to southern Idleb governorate. Exchange of fire and the GoS forces shelling to west Aleppo countryside as well as deterioration in the security situation in north Aleppo countryside caused internal displacement of 5,525 IDPs within Aleppo Governorate. While skirmishes between the NSAGs and the GoS forces caused displacement of about 800 IDPs in northern Latakia countryside. IDPs from other provinces across Syria have been moving in relatively small numbers in quest of better humanitarian conditions.
- 9,000 people have been evacuated from the last ISIL-held areas of Baghouz in Deir-ez-Zour Governorate, including almost 6,000 civilians who have been brought to Al-Hole camp in Al Hassakeh. 99 per cent of the new arrivals are women and children.
- During the month of December, the humanitarian community have tracked (119,698) spontaneous IDPs returnees in several areas across Syria. In Dar'a for example, it is estimated that there have been 54,000 IDP returns to areas of origin within the governorate since the territory returned under GoS control and services started being reactivated, albeit slowly. In Rural Damascus 26,168 IDPs returned to their original communities mainly from the same governorate as GoS started providing basic services. At the same period about 9,200 IDPs returned to their original communities within Aleppo governorate in GoS controlled areas and about 7,800 IDPs returned from Idleb to their communities in northern Hama countryside in GoS controlled areas. >> Other returns were also recorded as the security conditions improved, where about 2,700 IDPs returned within Idleb. Around 3,200 IDPs

⁶⁶ LPDC, Feb 11, 2019, <http://www.lpdc.gov.lb>



returned from Rural Damascus to Quneitra. About 1,200 people returned after being displaced within Quneitra and about 1,500 IDPs returned from Damascus to Deir-ez-zor.

- **Humanitarian Need Overview Quick Summary (Feb 28 - 2019):**

- 11.9 Million People in Need in Syria, 5.9 Million Female and 5.8 Million males in need, 5 Million Children in need (0-17 yrs), 1.3 million from them are (0-4 yrs.).
- 83% of Syrians live below the poverty line
- 13.2 Million people in need of health assistance
- 6 Million Children are in need of Education Assistance, 2.1 Million of them are out of school.
- 33% of people in Syria are food insecure.
- 15.5 Million People in need of WASH assistance, 6.2 Million of them are in acute need.
- 8.6 Million need early recovery and livelihood support.
- 9.1 Million need of Food Assistance and Agriculture.
- 4.7 Million need of Shelter support.
- 4.4 Million need of Non-Food Items.

Cyprus

- Refugees under UNHCR mandate currently residing in the northern part of Cyprus. They are mostly Syrians and Palestinians⁶⁷.
- Due to influx of refugees who use Cyprus as a staging ground to move to the rest of Europe, the island become a hub of activity for traffickers transporting human cargo through the occupied area or using rickety boats from Turkey to be abandoned on the sea and rescued by the Republic's Coast Guard⁶⁸.
- Most refugees face formidable obstacles in securing decent and affordable housing. This adds to the Cypriot citizen homelessness plight plaguing the country⁶⁹.
- Caritas Paphos was able to help 45 refugee families. Yet, it was able to help them in terms of providing them with some furniture, food and clothes. Yet the NGO warned, due to its lack of

⁶⁷ <https://www.unhcr.org/cyprus.html>

⁶⁸ Greek Reporter, Feb 22, 2019, <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2019/02/22/the-beginning-of-homelessness-in-cyprus/>

⁶⁹ Greek Reporter, Feb 22, 2019, <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2019/02/22/the-beginning-of-homelessness-in-cyprus/>



funding, that this is not enough as refugee numbers keep increasing and they need other forms of assistance⁷⁰.

- The president of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades participated in the 24-25 February EU-Arab league summit, where he discussed with the participants issues regarding the refugee crisis and ways to bolster EU-Arab relations to curb the problem.⁷¹
- Six refugee families which were stranded at British military base in Cyprus for more than 20 years have won legal battle to settle in the UK⁷².

4. CHURCH ACTIONS

- As part of The Church of Cyprus's campaign against dangerous sects, which seek to infiltrate the Cypriote communities and seek to financial gain, a foundation named "A Drug-Free World" has been identified as a branch of the Church of Scientology⁷³ on the 1st of February.
- Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and the rest of the East ended his visit on the 6th of February to Abu Dhabi where he attended the Global Conference of Human Fraternity. Before leaving the UAE, he spoke at the Lebanese Embassy about the importance of the new Lebanese government to execute policies which benefit the livelihood of people⁷⁴.
- His Holiness Patriarch Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church expressed his optimism about the reopening of the embassies in Syria. He voiced that Syria is heading towards stability, during a gathering held at the Patriarchal headquarters in Damascus on the 9th of February. Several diplomatic dignitaries were present at the event⁷⁵.
- On the 11th of February, the Presidents of the Council of Churches of Egypt celebrated the Council's sixth anniversary. Transparency, openness, and diversity, as concluded by the meeting, are important for the ecumenical process. The meeting was followed by the handing over of the General Secretariat of the Council by the Rev. Refaat Fathi, the former General Secretary, to Father Paul Jaras, representing the Catholic Church. Memorial gifts from Patriarch Isaac were then

⁷⁰ Cyprus Mail, Feb 01, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/02/01/urgent-appeal-to-help-syrian-boy-with-brain-tumour/>

⁷¹ Ahram Online, Feb 21, 2019, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/1198/325952/Egypt/EUArab-Summit/Cypriot-President-Anastasiades-to-attend-EUArab-Le.aspx>

⁷² Al Jazeera, Feb 07, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/refugee-families-stranded-cyprus-win-settle-uk-190207130101431.html>

⁷³ Cyprus Mail, Feb 01, 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/02/01/church-issues-warning-over-scientology-infiltration/>

⁷⁴ February 6, 2019, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3476432>

⁷⁵ Albawab, Feb 09, 2019, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3480191>



presented to the heads of the churches and the sixth foundation stone was laid to mark the sixth anniversary of the council.⁷⁶

- At the Cathedral of St. George of the Coptic Orthodox In the city of Giza, Egypt, a week of prayers for the unification of churches has been launched on the 11th of February. The event was attended Bishop Theodosius, the Bishop of central Giza, the Secretary General of the Council of Churches of Egypt, Rev. Paul Jaras, and the President of the Synod of the Nile, Rev. Rifaat Fikry. Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria later joined on the 13th of February, in which he seized the opportunity to highlight the importance of the Council of Churches in Egypt in unifying all the different Churches.⁷⁷
- On the 13th of February, the Bishops of the Greek Melkite Catholic Church called upon the new government to block any form of internal or external interference for the proper functioning of the state. They also demanded the bypassing of religious and sectarian quotas that are hindering the country. Furthermore, they spoke about the importance of finding a new mechanism to return the Syrian displaced people back to their homeland. The meeting which was held at the Patriarchal headquarters in Rabwa, was headed by His Holiness Joseph Absi, the Patriarch of the Greek Melkite Catholic Church.⁷⁸
- Archbishop Atallah, the Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, received religious leaders and a German parliamentary delegation on the 13th of February. He briefed them about the illegal policies and actions executed by the Israel on Jerusalem soil. He later thanked the delegation for its support of the Palestinian people.⁷⁹
- The Patriarch of Iraq's Chaldean Catholic Church, His Holiness Louis Raphael Sako described the Feb. 3-5 papal visit to United Arab Emirates, the first ever to the Arabian Peninsula, as historic. Therefore, he claimed that the Pope visiting Iraq is very possible and will be therefore arranged for⁸⁰. Also, Pope Francis appointed him on the 14th of February, as an advisor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican⁸¹.
- On the 16th of February, the Patriarch of Iraq's Chaldean Catholic Church, His Holiness Raphael Louis Sako and Ignatius Aphrem II the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, participated in the Munich Conference. His Holiness Sako spoke about the aspiration to civil society and the freedom of thought, doctrine and expression that modern man aspires to, and that religions are called to renew their mission bringing them closer to the understanding of contemporary man. As for his

⁷⁶ Feb 11, 2019, <http://saint-adday.com/?p=28445>

⁷⁷ Feb 11, 2019, <http://www.akhbarak.net/articles/35901076>

⁷⁸ NNA, Feb 13, 2019, <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/391820/>

⁷⁹ Dostor, Feb 13, 2019, <https://www.dostor.org/2516053>

⁸⁰ Crux, Feb. 11, 2019, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-middle-east/2019/02/11/top-iraqi-catholic-says-countrys-christians-really-need-a-papal-visit/>

⁸¹ Chaldean Patriarchate of Babylon, Feb 14, 2019, <http://saint-adday.com/?p=28500&fbclid=IwAR3XMPO3ofk-uLs77qBCC3yIpFtDFu-tjNaQcfYrzzGToAaJADLVn6OQ7wk>



Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, he discussed the situation of Christians in Syria and how different communities are willing to co-exist with one another⁸².

⁸² Saint Adday, Feb 16, 2019, <http://saint-adday.com/?p=28537&fbclid=IwAR2ycW-1PYzuCDauKjOCoc4IgcYj3JkRgoNBbp4Mq4P6gBzR9K3Yac5GUg8>



5. MECC HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES

MECC Visits Cypriot Orthodox Archbishop and Maronite Bishop (Feb. 22)



Photo Credit: MECC Website

MECC Team with His Beatitude Chrysostomos II

In the context of her visits to the Leaders of the Members Churches in The Middle East Council of Churches, MECC Secretary General Dr. Souraya Bechealany, together with Associate Secretary General Michael Spirou, MECC Theological and Ecumenical Department Fr. Gaby Hachem, and Policies and Communication Advisor Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, visited His Beatitude Chrysostomos II, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus at the Patriarchal Headquarters of Nicosia. The meeting was an occasion to discuss the importance of restoring MECC's effective role in safeguarding Oriental Christians' cause on all levels.



*MECC Team with His Beatitude Chrysostomos II
Photo Credit: MECC website*

Dr Bechealany and the MECC delegation informed the Archbishop of the new procedures followed by MECC so that to demonstrate a common understanding towards all the problems faced by the Christians and their fellow Muslims in this region. His Beatitude Chrysostomos gave his blessings to Dr Bechealany and MECC delegation and provided them with directions for a better service of humankind and for establishing peace in the region. He also stressed on the potential of Cyprus for building bridges with Europe paving the way for enhanced cooperation.

Furthermore, Dr Bechealany met His Eminence Youssef Soueif, the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, both engaging in further collaboration between the Maronite Church of Cyprus and MECC, especially regarding the common ecumenical concerns.



*MECC Team with His Eminence Youssef Soueif,
Photo Credit: MECC Website*

The visit to Cyprus also included a stop at the Theological Institute of the Church of Cyprus, and an agreement to further coordination and scholarly collaboration with MECC.

Theology Seminar at the University of Kaslik

Dr. Souraya Bechealany participated on the 26th of February, in the seminar “The Church and its Mission in the Middle East Today” organized by the Pontifical Faculty of Theology of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik. His Eminence the Patriarchal Vicar General, Bishop Rafik Warsha, Auxiliary Bishop of Sarba, His Eminence Bishop Paul Rouhana, Priests, Nuns, and a group of students were present at the event at University of Kaslik.



Dr. Souraya Bechealany
Photo Credit: MECC website

At the beginning of the seminar, the Dean of the College, Dr. Elias Jamhuri, welcomed the Secretary General and Professor of theology, with the words: "Today we have a lady who is not like all other women. She travels around meeting with top religious leaders in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Cyprus, and Jordan. This is in itself a unique Church event."

The General Secretary later thanked him for allowing and empowering her to speak at this seminar about her to speak about the Church and its mission and challenges today in the Middle East.

She spoke about the importance of coexistence with Muslim societies. In her own words, she claimed: "How can Christians be Christian in the Middle East without Muslims? How can Muslims be Muslims without Christians?" If one religion denies another, then that religion would deny itself because both religions are an integral part of one another.



Caritas Conference in Lebanon

Dr. Souraya Bechealany, the General Secretary of the MECC, together with the Regional Representative of ATC Middle East and North Africa Mr. Gordon Simango, attended the Caritas conference held on the 28th of February in the Keserwan region, held at the Monastery of Our Lady in Lebanon.



Dr. Souraya Bechealany at the Caritas conference
Photo Credit: <http://www.abouna.org>

Dr. Bechealany's discussed the ecumenical role of the Middle East Council of Churches, in charity, relief and the ways of cooperation between the Churches for the good and dignity of mankind.



6. MECC Humanitarian activities in Syria Feb 2019

- Distributed startup kits for 60 beneficiaries graduated from vocational training and business startup courses in Aleppo.
- Completed refresher training for 60 women in Aleppo, Daraa and Damascus related to health awareness.
- Continued livestock project to provide 200 families with sheep, fodder, herder and diary processing equipment in Al-Mseifra including rehabilitation of barns.
- Conducted needs assessment in five areas in Daraa governorate.
- Launched livelihood project in Daraa, Sweda and Damascus rural including vocational training for 200 youth and 100 women and providing 50 grants for restoration of broken business.
- Prepared to implement health awareness courses for 200 women in Daraa, Sweida and Damascus rural.
- Completed tender process to purchase and distribute 3344 hygiene kits in Daraa governorate.
- Selected business startup trainer to start courses for 100 skilled workers in Damascus rural.
- Prepared to start remedial courses for 50 students in grade 9 and 12 in Damascus rural.
- Started tender process to select centers to provide vocational training in Tartous.
- Prepared to pay the 2nd amount of the tuition fees supports for 175 students in different governorates



*Health Awareness Training for 20 women in Damascus
Photo Credit: MECC website*





7. CONCLUSION



*Vocational Training and Business start-up (Kits Distribution and Graduation Party) in Aleppo
Photo Credit: MECC website*

While major funding was cut from INGOs which operate in the Middle East, some other players have succeeded in securing donations to curtail the problem. Yet, power politics is still taking its toll in the Middle East and the issue of IDPs and refugees remain unsolved. Nevertheless, local Churches are paving the way for better peace and security in the region by complementing INGOs to meet certain shortages in policy execution. In other words, when humanitarian organizations are failing to meet certain expectations, Churches are stepping to fill the gaps and to solve the challenges emanating from the lack of funding.