



مجلس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

**Middle East Council of Churches
Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

**2008 Report
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by
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The MECC Christian Muslim Dialogue Program is related to the General Secretariat of the Council. I was appointed as director to this Program after my election as Associate General Secretary at the MECC Executive Committee Meeting last March 2008. Since I took over the Program, I acquainted myself with its previous activities and its planned commitments and projects. The 4-year plan of action was established, and aims and objectives of the program clarified. The follow-up process and execution of the activities were achieved over the past 6 months.

The Middle East Council of Churches' commitment towards Christian-Muslim dialogue is a natural concern and a necessity, basically correlated with the nature of the region and its demographic and religious distribution. Hence, interaction and communication with Muslims is at the heart of the Christian daily life and their presence in this pluralistic society. This reality raises an issue that goes beyond dialogue itself. It is related to the kind and nature of Christian presence within this special context, and its awareness to its special Christian vocation and message. The issue of Christian Presence in the Middle East is the responsibility of the Unit on Faith & Unity and Christian Presence in the Middle East.

The dialogue activity that is carried-out by the Council has its own characteristics, horizons and challenges. A major specificity of the program is that it works from an ecumenical Christian perspective, giving it a wider and more representative dimension, as well as a distinguished position, while at the same time, limiting its capacity to take initiatives and to present suggestions that might come from one Church or organization. The geographic scope of the dialogue extends to the whole region and beyond. At the content level, the dialogue in general addresses issues regarding values, life, culture and society. Theological dialogue is not approached due to the difficulty to reach a common position with the various opinions of member churches on this issue. The Christian-Muslim Dialogue faces two basic challenges. The first is restricted to an elite concerned by the dialogue, its loss of interaction and impact on the communities' reality and on religious groups, as well as on communication between them. The French thinker, Régis Debray, described this status as "Legend of Dialogue".¹

¹ " Can't you notice that the street is not concerned by our common statements and calls for a life in peace, forgiveness and brother-hood? Pessimism is increasing among us as well as fatigue and the feeling of incapacity, empty discourses, repetitions and beating around the bushThis is what we notice nowadays from the dialogue of civilizations, despite the trials to embellish the appearances through

The second challenge is how to preserve the Council's position and interests in the local dialogue forums, while Muslim partners are becoming more concerned in dialogue with the West, with Judaism and Asian religions. This change will cause an important change in the role and strategy of the Council in this area.

In conclusion, and before presenting the activities of this year, I would like to underline that the Council's commitment to this dialogue is not and should not be on the account of the churches' and organizations' special activities in this area. On the contrary, I believe and I seek to make this program supportive of those of the churches and integrated to their activities, and possibly working in partnership, when possible and necessary. This will motivate me to seek for coordination between the different Christian experts, and for openness towards its special characteristics and interaction between them through a new activity entitled: "Towards an Ecumenical Middle Eastern vision on Relations with Muslims".

Activities Achieved during the Year

Participation in Conferences and International Meetings:

1. Doha Conference for Dialogue held in May 2008. I could not participate in this meeting due to the closure of Beirut Airport during the sad events the country passed through. However, several representatives and personalities from member churches attended the event.
2. Participation in the Lambeth Consultation, upon an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury, from June 1-3, 2008. The meeting gathered 40 Scholars and Church representatives from different churches and countries, concerned with dialogue with Muslims. The aim of the consultation was to reflect and consult on the message of the Word "Sawaa'", and the possibility of a unified Church response to the word.
3. Participation in the Madrid World Conference, July 16-18, 2008, on the invitation of His Majesty King Abdallah Bin AbdelAziz, in the presence of an important number of church representatives from MECC member churches.
4. Participation of Associate General Secretary Elias El Halabi in the Regional Conference of the World Council of Religion and Peace in Egypt (July 2008)

Regional and international conferences organized by MECC:

1. Christian-Muslim 8th Youth Camp in Ainab, August 27-31, 2008 under the theme "Religions and Civil Peace" with 22 participants from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and the participation of 5 full time trainers.
2. East-West Youth Dialogue, August 2008, Jordan.

Finally, the Program is presently preparing for the Meeting of Religious Leaders in collaboration with the International Islamic Forum for Dialogue, that was postponed since the July 2006 war.

pictures...The impact of our seasonal 'dialogue traditions', on our path is insignificant..... As if we were in moving sands that swallow everything".

Regis Debray, Un mythe contemporain: le dialogue des civilisations, Seville, 27 juin 2007 (Fondation des Trois Cultures)