



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

Συμβούλιο Εκκλησιών Μέσης Ανατολής

Report of the General Secretary To the Executive Committee Meeting

Your Holiness, Beatitudes and Excellencies
Presidents of the Middle East Council of Churches
And Members of the Executive Committee

Cyprus is the land from where Saint Paul has fascinated the world with his preaching. And in Cyprus we meet for the second time in less than one year since the Ninth General Assembly held in November 2007. I thank His Beatitude Chrysostomos II, the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus, for hosting this meeting of the Executive Committee in this blessed Monastery. During our first meeting we had set a plan of action for the coming four years, and we meet today for appraisal of the work completed since December 2007 till September 2008, a nine-month period during which the Middle East Region witnessed several difficult circumstances that had their effects on the Christian presence and on our Churches in the region, be that in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria or in Egypt.

The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) had an effective role in the events of the region and was affected by them. Thus, MECC was present for our Iraqi brothers, inside and outside Iraq as it continued in its humanitarian relief work to help all, Christians and Muslims, in confirmation of our Christian presence in the region and in emphasis of the ties of common living. Also in Palestine, the work of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) continued in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as in Jordan and Lebanon. The DSPR is an integral part of MECC. And in Lebanon the Council's work was apparent in several fields: ecumenical, Church or individual. This was also true in Egypt and in various other countries.

I shall present first the most significant work done by the General Secretary during the past period. Mentioning the work done does not mean pretending that I reached the perfection in my work, as perfection is God's attribute only. But I endeavored to continue the journey I had started when God had chosen me for this service and responsibility in December 2003, and with the Churches' renewal of their trust in me in November 2007. I have worked carrying the cross of service with as motto (Unless the Lord builds the house. They labor in vain who built it. Unless the Lord guards the city. The watchman stays awake in vain.) Psalm 127:1

First: Activities of the General Secretary after the Ninth General Assembly

1. Meetings with the Heads of Churches

After the Ninth General Assembly, the General Secretary visited and held meetings with the Heads of the Member Churches from the four Families of Churches. The aim of those meetings was:

1. Explain the future vision and the new structure for the Council's work for the coming four years;
2. Inform the Heads of Churches who were not present about what took place during this General Assembly with the objective to obtain their guidance and advices concerning the work of the Council whose basic aim is working for the rapprochement among the Churches;
3. As for the Heads of Churches who were present, the objective was to thank them for their participation in the General Assembly, as a sign of their support, and also for their discussion of the future plan for the work of the Council.
4. Prepare for the Executive Committee Meeting held during 5-6 March 2008 at the Armenian Orthodox Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias.
5. After the meeting of the Executive Committee and until today I continued visiting the Heads of Churches in the various countries of the region: in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus and Jordan, and for several times. Communication with the Heads of Churches in Iraq and Palestine was by telephone. The details of these visits are in the Narrative Progress Report, January-June 2008 pp.1-3. A copy of this report was enclosed with the invitation to this meeting.

2. Meetings with Muslim Leaders in the Middle East Region

In order to consolidate the Christian-Muslim dialogue being one of the priorities of the Council's work, the General Secretary held several meetings with all the Muslim leaderships and authorities in the region, be that in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine or Jordan, and that was in the context of deepening the relation with these various leaderships. I would like to mention here that the Council was present in the Christian-Muslim meeting held in Jordan under the title "Common Living and Peace Making". The Council collaborated with the Jordanian Center for Research on Common Living in the preparation for this meeting; and the General Secretary of the Council made a speech titled "The Council's Role in the Christian-Muslim Dialogue". See Al Muntada magazine, Issue of June 2008, pp. 47-48.

3. Conferences Attended by the General Secretary Representing the Council

The General Secretary represented the Council in several conferences among which:

1. Participation as observer in part of the Fifth Meeting for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church. This meeting was held in the Convent of Saint Ephrem The Syrian, in Ma 'arat Saydnaya, from 27 January to 2 February, 2008.
2. Presence in the meetings of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, in Geneva, during the period 13-20 February, 2008.
3. Presence in the opening session to the Twentieth Conference of the Higher Islamic Council in Cairo, 15-17 March, 2008.
4. Presence in the Eleventh Meeting of the Patriarchs Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, in Cairo, during 9-10 May, 2008.

4. Visiting Ecumenical Delegations Received by the General Secretary

The Council received many ecumenical delegations. From the beginning of this year the General Secretary accompanied the various ecumenical delegations in visiting the Church leaderships and Muslim authorities in Lebanon, Egypt and Syria. These delegations have also visited Jordan and Palestine. The objective of these visits by the ecumenical delegations was the expression of solidarity and consolidation of the Christian presence in this Orient and also deepening the relation of the Council with the Churches in the West and with the ecumenical organizations. I will mention here some of these ecumenical visits:

1. Visit by a delegation from the Churches in Germany to Lebanon and Syria during the period 2-9 February, 2008. See Al Muntada Magazine, Issue of July 2008, p.35.
2. Received a delegation from the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) headed by its General Secretary in a visit to Cairo-Egypt, 28-31 March, 2008. See Al Muntada Magazine, Issue of July 2008, p.34.
3. Received a delegation from the Church of Scotland accompanied by Rev. Joseph Qassab, member of the Executive Committee, at the Council's Offices in Beirut, Lebanon, on 8 April, 2008.
4. Accompanied a delegation from the WCC headed by its General Secretary Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia during his visit to Lebanon, Dubai and Syria, in the period 17-21 April, 2008. Aside from meeting with the heads of Churches and the Muslim authorities in Syria, the delegation had a meeting with President Dr. Bashar El Assad in Damascus.
5. Also accompanied the WCC delegation headed by Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia during his first visit to Egypt since he assumed the responsibility of the WCC General Secretariat. This visit was from 16-21 June, 2008. Aside from meeting the Heads of Churches and the Muslim and official authorities in Egypt, the delegation visited the General Secretary of the Arab League, Mr. 'Amro Moussa.
6. Visit by a delegation from the United Church of Christ to the Council and the Region: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine during the period 9-17 July, 2008.
7. Visit by a delegation from the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCCUSA) to the Middle East. This is one of the important visits that deepen the ecumenical relations. It started in Palestine and from there to Jordan and then to Syria and Lebanon, and was during the period 22 July-3 August, 2008. This delegation included the President of NCCUSA, its General Secretary and the Associate President for the Inter-Faith Dialogue MECC General Secretary accompanied them during their meetings with the Heads of Churches and the Christian and Muslim authorities in Syria and Lebanon.
8. Visit by a delegation from the Presbyterian Church in America (PCUSA) during the last month and their meeting with MECC General Secretary and directors in our offices in Beirut, Lebanon.
9. The last of these ecumenical visits was by a delegation representing the Catholic and Evangelical Churches in Germany and headed by Rev. Andreas Maurer. The objective of this visit was to invite and host a delegation from the Council during June 2009 and also for participation in the Church Day in Germany in the year 2010. This delegation was accompanied by Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, member of the Executive Committee. For more details about

these visits, see MECC monthly electronic issues from February till August 2008.

In response to a question about the benefit from these visits I say:

- These visits help the Council's voice to reach the world at large in defense of the Orient's issues, through our partners and their ecumenical councils.
- With their visits there is an expression of solidarity to the Christian presence in this Orient from which Christianity spread to the rest of the world.
- Through their visits to the Heads of Churches they get to know the support of the leaders to the mission of the Council and the importance of its existence and of its role.
- Concerning the visits to Muslim authorities, they constitute a support to the Christian-Muslim relations at the world level and a confirmation of the common living and the dialogue of life between the Christians and Muslims in the region

5. The General Secretary and Supervision over the Activities of the Departments, Divisions and Programs.

a. Activities of the Service Departments Related to the General Secretariat

According to the enclosed Chart clarifying the new structure of the Council, which was approved and established during the Executive Committee Meeting on 5-6 March, 2006, the Council includes the following service departments: Department on Finance, Department on Planning, Evaluation and Follow-up, Department on Enhancing Fund Raising and Department on International Ecumenical Relations. Following is a brief exposition of the activities done by these departments. The detailed reports will be presented by the directors of these departments, later.

1. Department on Finance

The Finance and Administration Committee met twice during which it reviewed the presented budget covering the Council's activities for the coming four years and studied ways to reduce it in order to avoid a deficit, and it also put emphasis on using the designated fund in the field of activity set for it. Enclosed with this report is a thank you letter from the UNHCR praising the precision in the work of the Finance Department in the Council. The Financial Report will clarify the finance policy followed by the Department and the suggestions proposed by the Committee as proper for the work of the Council. I also praise the letter sent by the Committee to the partners clarifying the administrative steps that were taken during the past four years. Enclosed is a copy of this letter.

2. Department on Communication

The Department works to realize two aims :

1. Interest in communication by way of publishing the Council's news and activities and the news about visiting ecumenical delegations, in addition to publishing the various statements issued by the Council in the newspapers particularly in Lebanon and in Egypt.
2. Interest in having information reach the Churches and friends, and this is done by publishing Al Muntada Magazine, in the Arabic language. The last issue was published in June 2008 covering the activities of the Council and its news since the Ninth General Assembly until today. To note that the new issue of

the French magazine *Le Courrier Oecumenique* was published this week. In addition, a committee was formed to publish a new issue this year (2008) of the *NewsReport Magazine*, in English. The Department also furnishes the Council's electronic site with the Council's news, in Arabic or in English. In addition, there is the monthly publication that covers all the activities of the Council and is issued in English by the Department on International Ecumenical Relations, and it is distributed via the electronic mail.

3. Collaboration with the Christian television stations, particularly with Nour Sat/ TeleLumiere and SAT 7. The Council's activities in Egypt are covered by Agapy and CTV, the two stations related to the Orthodox Coptic Church, in addition to SAT 7 in Egypt. Thus the viewer in the Middle East and in the world at large can know the news of the Middle East Council of Churches. Further, the Council succeeded to have the Director of the Communication Department become member of the World Association for Christian Communication/ Middle East..

3. Department on Planning, Evaluation and Follow-up

The General Secretary specified the general aim for this Department and how to coordinate its work with the Department on International Ecumenical Relations and the Department on Enhancing Fund Raising, in accordance with the reasons for the new structure. This Department worked from the beginning to encourage the coordination among the various divisions, departments and programs of the Council, and it issued an evaluation questionnaire to be adopted for the various activities of the Council. The Associate General Secretary and Director of this Department attended some of these activities in order to give an evaluation report about them. He is also working to put a plan for training the leaderships in the Council in which speakers will be specialists in the fields of funding or evaluation or planning or writing project proposal.

4. Department on International Ecumenical Relations

Reader of the monthly electronic publication (*NewsBrief*) notices the work done by this Department to collect information about the activities from the departments, divisions and programs, and about the ecumenical activities of the various agencies and councils. The reader of this publication can know about what took place in the Council during the month. This Department also maintains the relation between the Council and the Partners and between the Council and the Churches, in continued communication. This Department prepares also the yearly and bi-yearly report covering the Council's activities.

5. Department on Enhancing Fund Raising

The General Secretary specified the important role this department should assume in accordance with the Council's financial policy, and the work to confirm the importance of that on the Christian presence. Thus, there was the effort, through the Department, with the Churches to host some free of charge meetings, such as our meeting now in the Kiko Monastery hosted by the Church of Cyprus, or support of some activities or thinking and planning to organize meetings during which it is possible to talk about the activities of the Council and benefit from them to collect donations which will make the participation of the local Churches and individuals relatively higher compared with the support from the Partners. Also, working to find

new partners at the regional or world levels, in coordination with the International Ecumenical Relations Department, and keeping in line with the aims of the Council.

b. Programs Related to the General Secretariat

1. Program on Christian-Muslim Dialogue

The Program on Christian-Muslim Dialogue is considered one of the most important programs that the Council concentrates on supporting and rendering more effective in order to highlight our presence in this holy part of the world, and on our dialogue of life with our Muslim brothers. In this connection, the Council had, during the last four years, a noted activity either at the level of the Christian and Muslim leaderships, at the level of the young people, or at the level of the humanitarian work.

With the beginning of my second term at the General Secretariat, my concern was to have one of the Associate General Secretaries devote his time for increasing the efficiency of this commitment.

The Council participated, in an effective way, in a number of conferences, the details of which will be presented in the report of the Program's Director. However, I like to concentrate on the following:

1. Meeting in Jordan on common living and peace making, in which I participated with a speech about the Council's role and interest in dialogue. See Al Muntada Magazine, issue of June 2008, pp. 47 and 48.
2. Presence of the Associate General Secretary, Father Dr. Fadi Dao at the Meeting of Dialogue held in Canterbury upon invitation from the Archbishop of England.
3. Participation in the International Conference for Dialogue (ICD) that was held in Madrid upon invitation from the Conference of the Muslim World League. The ICD was opened with words from the Saudi King Abdullah and the King of Spain.
4. Due to security circumstances in May 2008 and the closure of Beirut International Airport, the Council could not participate in the Sixth Conference for Dialogue in Al Doha, although the General Secretary was invited to participate. However, the Council as such was not absent in this Conference as some members of the Executive Committee, such as H.E. Anba Yuhanna Kolta participated in it.
5. The Council participated in the Regional Dialogue Meeting that was organized by the World Council of Religions for Peace(WCRP), represented by the Associate General Secretary, Mr. Elias El Halabi.

This is besides the meeting at the young people's level which will be talked about in the report by the Program's Director.

I would like to note here that we have received requests from many Muslim and Christian organizations asking for copies of the book containing the works of the Second Meeting between the World Islamic Forum for Dialogue and the Middle East Council of Churches, titled "Religion and the Human Rights and Duties". This was translated to the English language and distributed at the Ninth General Assembly. This shows the interest in what is published by the Council on this subject.

2. Program on Justice, Peace and Human Rights

Given that this Program has done several steps towards realizing its aims, and since there were activities that the Program had to complete in continuation of its work during the past four years, the Program continued to work under the General Secretariat. It concentrated on the role of religious organizations in defense of human dignity by putting the strategies of monitoring, follow-up and publication of the human rights. It also continued its work towards establishing a forum and an observatory, in cooperation with the Council of Catholic Patriarchs, which was approved by MECC during its Executive Committee meeting of March 2006, in order to monitor the issues of justice and human rights in the Arab World.

The importance of the observatory is to highlight a constructive pattern for the preservation of human dignity.

c. The Council's Units

1. Division on Faith and Unity and Christian Presence in the Middle East

The principal activity of this Division this year is the celebration of the first centennial of the prayer for Christian unity. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was celebrated during January 2008. The main title of the prayer was "Pray Without Ceasing" 1 Th. 5:17. The Unit organized several activities during the Week for Prayer the details of which will be in the report by the Director of the Unit. Further, the Schools of Theology in the Middle East arranged for a church celebration for its schools with the aim to highlight the Church heritage of the Churches, members in ATIME. Egypt was also lucky during this Week as it was celebrated for a period of eight days. And there was celebration of this Week in Damascus; Aleppo and Homs. A file on this Week is included in the Al Muntada Magazine, issue of July, 2008, pp 16-21.

2. Unit on Education and Leadership Development

In accordance with the new structure of the Council, the activities of this Division include activities for programs on: woman, young people, family and Christian schools. May be the Program on Woman in Egypt was pioneer as it was able to organize, in collaboration with the Program on The World Call of Woman to Combat Poverty, a meeting titled "The Woman Judges Poverty" attended by 100 participants. Also the Program on Woman in Lebanon had a meeting in the Convent of the Antonite Sisters in Bekfaya on "Opposition to Violence at home" attended by 40 participants.

As to the activities of young people, the most important was the regional meeting held in Jordan where it gathered young people from the various countries of the Middle East and the West around the title " Promoting East/West Dialogue and Peace building". This is a follow up to the meeting that was held in Syria on 2007 gathering young people from the East and West.

There was also the meeting of the Church-related Christian schools that was held in Egypt under the title "Towards a School Related to the Church Subject to the Criteria of Excellence for the realization of the Culture of Peace and Rejection of Violence". It was an outstanding meeting that was opened by H.E. Dr. Safwat El Bayadi, President of the Council for the Evangelical Family. The General Secretary had a speech in this meeting as well as several other participants. The

meeting was attended by 75 persons including directors of the Christian schools, from the four Families of Churches.

The Program on The Family in Egypt is preparing for meetings and conferences on the book (Your Guide to a Successful Marriage) in Arabic. This book constitutes part three of the book series produced by this Program covering the period before engagement, then the second part is about the engagement period...The three parts of this series constitute a successful guide to family directives.

3. Unit on Diakonia and Social Justice

After the Ninth General Assembly, this Unit coordinated for a workshop on "Solidarity for the Rights of Migrants and Perspectives of Development". That was during 7 and 8 February 2008 at the time it was still known as Unit on Life and Service/Refugee Service Program. This was an excellent meeting in which some international organizations had participated. See Al Mundata Magazien, issue of June 2008, pp.63 and 64.

Then there was the meeting I am proud of, that took place in partnership with the World Council of Churches. Titled "The Changing Ecclesial Context: Impact of Migration on Living together in Diversity" this meeting took place at the Armenian Orthodox Catholicosate of Cilicia, during April 2008. Present at the opening session and during some sessions of the meeting, were H.H. Catholicos Aram I and H.E. Bishop Boulos Matar, in addition to a number of the members of the Executive Committee from the four Families of Churches, and also representatives for the Muslim leaderships in Lebanon.

In addition, the Unit does a great work in coordination with the UNHCR in helping the refugees whether Somalis or Sudanese. The Office assists now 6000 Iraqis aside from the 250-300 Somali and Sudanese families. The Division received a letter from UNHCR praising the work of the Council. To note that the Director of the Unit is now Chairperson for the Steering Committee on Capacity Development- ACT.

d. Programs with Special Status or Emergency Nature

1. Inter Church Network for Development and Relief (ICNDR)in Lebanon

During the past period, and following the approval of your Committee to continue the work on the new structure for ICNDR in Lebanon, the Council continued with ACT the required steps. In this context, the external expert Mr. Gregory Hess met with the old and new members of the Program's Committee, in Beirut. It is important to note that the present Central Committee is composed of 4 members from the Executive Committee, representing the four families of Churches, and 4 other members who are experts in the fields of development, legal matters and finance. Agreement was reached concerning the system of work for the coming period, provided that the General Secretary, the Finance Secretary and the Director of the Program to be Ex Officio members in this Committee by virtue of their positions. The External expert, Mr. Gregory Hess presented his report which was sent to the partners. And during a Conference Call that took place with the partners on one side and Bishop Boulos Matar, Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, Bishop George Saliba, the General Secretary of the Council, Miss Vivian Lorenzo, the

Finance Secretary and Mrs. Suad el Haj Nassif , Director of ICNDR, on the other side a discussion took place of all the points in the Terms of References and some of them were modified before approval of the final form and signature by the General Secretary, the Director of ICNDR and the Director of ACT representing the partners. The external expert, Mr. Gregory Hess and his assistant, Mr. Jonathan Wood were present in two training meetings for the employees in the Program, the first was from 10-14 August, 2008 and was attended by some members of the Executive Committee, and the second was from 8-12 September, 2008.

A meeting was held of the ICNDR Committee in its new formation, at the Council offices in Beirut on 27/8/2008, during which several matters related to the future of the Program and its work were discussed. The Director of the Program will meet the partners in Geneva during the coming month of October. Further, the Partners Meeting that will take place during 20 and 21 November, 2008 will include a special circle organized to study, evaluate and put future plan for the work of ICNDR in Lebanon. It is important to note here that, according to TOR the partners will guarantee settling the deficit borne by the Council on behalf of ICNDR during 2007 which amounts to Ninety One Thousand Seven Hundred American dollars (US \$ 91,700.-), provided the Churches will bear 25% of the amount and the partners will bear covering the rest of the amount over a three years period. With this we will be doing a big step towards restructuring ICNDR in Lebanon.

2. Ecumenical Relief Service

I have mentioned in the beginning of my report that the Council assists many Iraqis, and it continued its work with Appeal MEIQ71 in cooperation with ACT in assisting the Iraqis inside Iraq and in Syria, and Jordan by way of providing assistance in the form of food, finances and cloths for children, and also by way of providing assistance to Church related health centers. This is in addition to providing vocational training for the young Iraqis in Syria.

Recently, In September 2008, and in collaboration with ACT the work started with Appeal MEIQ81 and the Council is participating in the part concerning the Iraqis in Syria.

This is in addition to cooperation with the Catholic Organization, MISSIO that presented to the Council a donation to assist 2,000 Iraqi families in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Also, the United Church of Christ (UCC) presented an assistance for 250 Iraqi families.

Similarly, the MERCY CORP Organization is coordinating with MECC Office in Syria to assist some Iraqi families that are present in Syria. The total number of beneficiaries has reached 1,000. Also, the Vocational Training Project sponsored by this Organization has started and will offer a chance to about 620 persons to be trained.

3. Department on Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR)

The work of this Department is a true Christian witness; it is addressed to the Palestinian Refugees in Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon.

The DSPR has formed its new Central Committee on 7 May, 2008 and on this same date the new Committee held its first meeting in Amman, after which it had a two-day meeting with the partners on 9 and 10 May, 2008. Through its several activities in the fields of health, vocational training and digging water wells in the West Bank, and through its activities for the young people and women, and also through the small loans that help the young persons continue their education or expand their work or develop it, the DSPR confirms the right of the Palestinian refugee to a dignified life and to ensure his basic right to a secure future.

Second: Relation with the Partners

A specific date was set for a meeting with the partners on 13 and 14 May, 2008. However, due to the painful events during that period in Lebanon, it was not possible to hold the meeting. It was substituted by a consultation meeting in Amman on the margin of the DSPR meeting. This meeting with the partners lasted for five hours and was attended by the General Secretary, the Finance Secretary, the Director for the International Ecumenical Relations, the Director of the Office in Syria, and the Director of the Unit on Education and Leadership Development. During the meeting, the plan of action and the proposed budget for the four years were discussed, also was discussed the evaluation report that was presented on the ICNDR. And it was agreed to set a new date for a two-day meeting on 20 and 21 November 2008 in Lebanon, during which one day will be devoted for the discussion and study of the Council's activities, and a day will be for discussion of the ICNDR structure.

Some Presidents of the Council saw it important to hold a meeting at an earlier date than the one set. A letter to this effect was sent to the partners and agreement was reached to hold a one-day meeting on 23 July, 2008 in order to secure that the budgets of the donor agencies will include an early support to the Council's projects for the coming year. This meeting with the partners was a distinguished one, it was attended by one of the Council's Presidents in Lebanon, Bishop Boulos Matar and some members of the Executive Committee in Lebanon: Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, Bishop George Saliba, Bishop Kegam Khacherian and Lawyer Elias Moukheiber. The minutes of this meeting were sent by electronic mail to all members of the Executive Committee.

During the aforementioned meeting, there was presentation of reports from the Unit and departments including their plan of action during the coming period, also a report on the financial situation until 10/7/2008 and a bi-yearly report covering the Council's activities and also the new structure. There was transparency and frankness throughout the meeting, and there was a talk about what will take place concerning ICNDR during the coming period until November 2008, and about the financial policy for the Council and how to work towards the participation of the Churches in financing the Council either by way of providing places and accommodations for the meetings or by donations in cash, in order to raise the percentage of the Churches' participation along with the subscriptions. We have received from some partners letters commending the seriousness of the meeting and of the support to the Council's work which encourages more efforts.

Further, the General Secretary met on 25 August, 2008, at the Council's Office in Beirut, with the representative of Kerkin Acte/ICCO with whom the leaders of

work at the Council have met as well. See the report on the meeting with the partners sent by electronic mail to all members of the Executive Committee.

The next meeting with the partners will be held on 20 and 21 November, 2008, in Lebanon.

The New Structure: Application and Difficulties

The Executive Committee has approved the new structure for the Council (Chart enclosed), provided it will be tried for one year. But I do have some comments and see some difficulties that I would like to expose to your esteemed Committee:

1. The number of employees is now 52, with 39 full-time employees and 13 part-time employees. By gender they are 24 males and 28 females. This still constitutes a financial burden on the Council as the total amount of salaries is forty five thousand American dollars (US\$45,000.-) per month. I was looking to reduce the number of employees in the structure in order to guide the expenses.

2. Some Units in the new structure were given additional other programs, and I feel this constitutes a burden on the directors, particularly at the beginning of their work. For example, the Unit on Education and Leadership Development was given also the Program on Human Resources Development in addition to the Formation on Human Rights. This is different from what was the case of the previous Unit on Christian Education and Renewal.

3. The Program on Justice, Peace and Human Rights has a history in the Middle East that was built during the past years. This Program continued its work as related to the General Secretariat, and it works on:

- a. Conflict prevention
- b. Commitment by the believers and religious organizations to the issues of justice
- c. Democratic transitional change and social defenses
- d. Role of the religious organizations in defending human dignities
- e. Resolving juveniles conflict with the law from the perspective of restorative justice.
- f. Clearing the concepts from traditional translations
- g. The Bible as full-time citizenship
- h. Monitoring of the issues of justice, peace and human rights, aiming to resolve the conflicts and development
- i. Solidarity with the issues of the woman and child concerning the economic and civil rights, and the gender.

The Program on Justice, Peace and Human Rights is not a mere activity of Formation on the human rights, but it is a program that deals with man and his rights and has its budget that covers the issues the Program is defending with a value and moral dimensions. For this reason, I consider it better for this activity to return as a program such as the Program on Christian-Muslim Dialogue.

4. We were not able, as was expected in the new structure, to have the Associate General Secretaries as directors of Units, but we could have them as directors of departments and programs. Thus, Father Dr. Fadi Daou was assigned as Director for the Program on Christian-Muslim Dialogue, and Rev. Dr. Nuhad Tomeh as

Coordinator for the ERS Program, and Mr. Elias El Halabi as Director for the Department on Planning, Evaluation and Follow-up.

5. I feel that the Executive Committee Decision E.C.8/2008 that specifies the work with the new structure for a period of one year as a transition period, is in need to be studied again in this meeting, as six months have already passed since our last meeting, and I see it difficult now to organize another meeting within five months from today.

6. When we tried to apply what was proposed to collect funding for the Council through own efforts either through donations from the Churches or application of a subscription fee in the meetings etc. we found no response. For this reason I repeat what I proposed in the last meeting about funding for the Council

- Request to form a committee from the members of the Executive Committee, from the four Families of Churches, in every country to cooperate with the General Secretary in the operation of local funding from businessmen and persons interested in the ecumenical work;
- To have one Sunday called "Day of the Middle East Council of Churches" during which the Church leaderships allow that the donations be for the Council. It may be useful to indicate, in the sermon of this day, the importance of the Council's existence in this holy land.
- Urge and encourage the member Churches to donate to the Council, in cash or in kind by way of offering places for holding the activities or giving offices to the Council, in some countries, free of charge.
- For the Churches to host meetings of the Executive Committee such as our present meeting, and I thank repeatedly His Beatitude Chrysostomos II, the Archbishop of Cyprus for hosting us in this place.

I have presented these suggestions during our last meeting and I repeat them in view of their importance.

Your Holiness, Beatitudes and Excellencies,

This is your Council, and the continuation of its service, work and success is to confirm the Christian presence in the Region which is the cradle of Christianity and is the source of blessings to the world and to the Christian world in particular.

I conclude with a piece of liturgy repeated by the Orthodox Coptic Church, my mother, in its Mass where it says:

(O Lord our God come back and look from heaven and take care of this vine that You have planted with Your right hand, correct it and confirm it)

May the Lord take our Council in His care and bless our service for the glory of His Holy Name.

Guirgis Ibrahim Saleh
General Secretary
The Middle East Council of Churches