



مجلس الكنائس المتحدة في الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

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REPORT OF THE PROGRAM ON JUSTICE, PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Introduction

There is no doubt that the essential struggle to spread and legislate for human rights has come to be a crucial factor in guaranteeing a stable society built on justice and peace. This requires the development of the role of the Middle East Council of Churches and of the churches themselves in this area, especially where religion maintains a high standing and where religious culture and traditions form the most important source of values and morality. There must, therefore, be a transition to a second role, which will provide the information for a wider resurgence in the third millennium.

This is the reason why nobody argues with the fact that churches in the Middle East region, their minority notwithstanding, have a prophetic role to play in advocating human rights. Thus, in their involvement in advocacy work, the churches provide a founding pillar to the spiritual and ethical values of humanity that complement the legalistic side of human rights protection.

In 2007, the JPHR program starts its work with a focus on the spread of a culture of human rights and on advocacy concepts and techniques.

In this regard, the program focused on “The Role of Believers and Religious Institutions in Advocacy and Protection of Rights”. It also focused on values and factors that lead to social transformation, like human rights concepts, power of citizens in the social changes, and work at the communities’ level.

Consequently, the JPHR program executed the phase three of “together in building a culture of prevention of conflicts”.

It is worth mentioning here that a vital need came up during our activities to raise awareness on the concept and practices of “Democracy” as a political value rather than a political affiliation.

In this respect, we designed and started the implementation of a project on “Peaceful Transition towards Democracy” at the local community’s level with the help of

church representatives, local NGOs and religious related organizations. This project concentrates on Values that have political terminologies.

Therefore, from 2008 till 2010, the JPHR program- besides its stable focuses to empower active groups from Churches and church related organizations- aims to be more concerned in advocacy for issues related to peoples' rights, religious freedom and equal citizenship with a special focus on:

- Social Defences: its components and necessary programs and projects to be developed.
- The equal participation and democracy in the society
- The Citizen's power in the social transformation
- Women's right to protection and gender equality and children's rights: freedom of expression and participation
- Replacing the punishment of children in conflict with law, and enable those children to serve in the public institutions

In compliance with a recommendation of the Heads of Churches an observatory and a Forum for human rights in the Middle East have been approved. This recommendation was approved by the Executive Committee of the Council. The aim of these observatory and Forum is, beside the involvement of the believers in the protection of human dignity, is to present periodic report to the Heads of Churches, and to make an effort with the concerned governments to consolidate justice and peace and to push forward the wheels of human rights in the Middle East.

To prepare for the monitor, the program focused on The Role of the Church and its related institutions in defense of human rights, in a serie of small consultations and meetings which were held with experts and persons concerned in the issues of human rights, composed of clergy and laymen. The Program also took adopted the same title for a regional consultation in which a group of intellectuals, experts and activists in the field of human rights, from some countries in the Middle East, have participated.

The consultation mentioned above discussed the proposal of creating an observatory to follow-up the situation of human rights in the Middle East. Thorough discussions took place and showed the Churches' urgent need for such an observatory to facilitate their performing a more effective and comprehensive role in support of human rights, and that stems from the certainty that religions in their principles –as stated in the Holy Books- are in accordance with the international laws for human rights, at least in their following basis: **consideration of the human being as an absolute self value - consideration of the human being as a free being – and brotherhood among human beings.**

The process of setting up the observatory has become a must today because of the abuses of human rights that are taking place in most countries of the Middle East, and in particular those related to: religious freedom, equality and political participation with no religious discrimination, resorting to violence in the name of religion, the penalty of death, woman's rights, religious education and personal status. That, in addition to the need to crystallizing value concepts such as: the tolerance, concept of

the neighbor, the relation with the other religion, the mercy, the forgiveness...through the live witness of the believers.

Thus, and given the complete obscuring of information concerning these abuses, we see the importance and necessity for the Church to assume a pioneering role in the defense of human rights, provided that be through the concept of citizenship and the legal criteria, and for it to urge the Christians for political participation, using all available means including the media.

Starting from 2009 the Forum , Monitor and Website will be the active means for advocacy which will target the Church leaders, the communities, NGO's and all who are committed to the cause of human rights and justice. A focus group will be well trained in advocacy work on human rights, the protection of women and children living in situations of conflict.

Assessment and Impact

- 1- Participants in Justice, Peace and Human Rights Program activities concluded that the Middle East Council of Churches has played a significant role in increasing awareness on human rights, in strengthening the resolve of the church to being an instrument of peace and reconciliation, and as an advocate of dialogue and justice. Furthermore, with the spiritual foundation that accompanies practical human rights training, churches are able to promote human rights not only at the practical level but also from an understanding that theirs is an expression of the Christian faith and ministry in religiously diverse societies.
- 2- The project on Spreading a Culture of Human Rights and teaching of human rights reached around 1000 students in schools and universities and participants from local trainings and workshops. Working with the religious seminaries was very hectic, as it relies on a very strong bureaucracy that identify most of the churches structures, which makes it very difficult to reach the same group of student we needed to.
- 3- Empowerment and advocacy on Conflict prevention touching different sectors of the communities and society were met with a wide range of church representatives and NGO's representatives. A large group from local communities was empowered to initiate and launch activities helping at widening the necessary and needed impact, with the hope to be able to continue this work this year as well.
- 4- The program succeeded in joining hands with a wide number of religious organizations, specialized NGO's and civil society, considering that the main reason for such work, is the mission of the church, which is an instrument of justice, peaceful resolution of conflict, reconciliation, and an integral part of the Christian faith.
- 5- In order to avoid loading the Council with heavy wages and big numbers of employees, the JPHR program works closely with consultants, experts on specific issues and with volunteers.

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