

**Report of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees
Middle East Council of Churches
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Continued Witness in times of Tribulation

In times of tribulation, the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches continues its work of witness in the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Galilee. As a result of the political impasse in the Palestinian Territories, DSPR in consultation with ACT Geneva Office launched a new ACT Appeal MEPL71 in July 2007 seeking to serve thousands of families in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Our objective from this appeal, as with previous ACT Appeals since October 2000, with a target of three quarters of a million US Dollar is to reach to the neediest of the most adversely affected families and to provide them with some relief. Altogether, the 7 Appeals launched so far have brought in over \$US3.5 million. This translates into providing assistance to over 70,000 Palestinian families with over 400,000 members who are in need in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The response of partners and their constituencies; Churches, Civil Society Groups, Governments and Private Individuals, has been rewarding primarily on strengthening the human link that reaches across to lend a helping hand unconditionally, in the truest Christian witness tradition. In Lebanon, the after effects of last year's war are still felt and DSPR has cooperated with MECC and others to ensure its witness in times of great need. 250 families who moved from Nahr El Bared to Shatila Camp were helped by the ACT Appeal launched by MECC. DSPR Lebanon cooperated with MECC to make extending a helping hand to these families a reality. In spite of the hardships suffered by so many in the Palestinian Territories and the Lebanon, our regular work there continued and indeed has progressed. Likewise, in Jordan and Galilee our commitment to the needy and to the refugees led us to persevere in our work and programs. Jordan's overall outreach has diversified to women's and youth groups and remains persistent in providing needed medical care. In Galilee, beside the largest university student loan program, inter group work promotes the idea that there is a common ground that unites even the most different groups in society or across societies. Lately, the Galilee DSPR co-hosted an important medical conference on Gynecology and Obstetrics which was attended by well over 150 medical doctors, specialists and others from across the Holy Land, which made it an important venue for exchange of professional medical knowledge on a topic of significance to thousands of people, irrespective of color, nationality, religion or political conviction. DSPR in all of its activities and projects is guided by a common strategy of effective service that gets translated into plans of action that seek to reflect DSPR as a Church Related Organization witnessing to those in need among the Palestinian refugees and others. We seek to be professional in our work and we are always striving to improve our performance.

Major Programs and Activities

Our major programs and activities revolve around 4 areas of operation:

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION reaches to over 1200 students and trainees in a variety of educational and vocational programs in all Areas of DSPR. In the **GAZA STRIP** DSPR (NECCCRW) continues to offer 3-year high quality courses in Carpentry (69 students); Metal & Aluminum Works (37 students); General Electricity and Motor Rewinding (38 students); Secretarial Studies & English Language (34 students); Sewing (14 students) and Computer (30 students). When Electricity supply was cut due to Israeli military strike on major electricity power station, DanChurchAid provided a generator. Norwegian Church Aid and other partners sustained the training of Gaza students for scholastic year 2006/2007. In the **WEST BANK** DSPR (NECC – ICC) undertook the construction of 15 Classrooms in Girls' Schools in Arraba (6 classrooms); Silet Al Daher (6 classrooms) and Qabatia (3 classrooms). In **LEBANON** DSPR (JCC) offered Vocational Training for 21 women in Hairdressing and Beauty Skills in both Sabra and Saida; 4 men in Barber Skills. The Electronic School is being reactivated with a new premise and the addition of 2 new areas of electronics and students are applying. Besides, JCC Lebanon offered Summer Tutorials (44 Students for 2 months); Official Exam Tutorials (14 Students for All Summer); English Courses at Dbayeh Camp (24 Students); Teachers Training for Slow Learners (5 Teachers Trained). A library in Dbayeh Camp was started. In **JORDAN** 56 girls enrolled in Women Training Centers; 32 students received University Student Loans; 58 trainers participated in Training of Trainers programs; 68 Trainers and Educators of different NGOS participated in workshops on Guidance and Counseling while 15 students were enrolled in Vocational Training and 13 Staff Members and Educators enrolled in Capacity Building programs. In **GALILEE** a group of 15 girls aged 13 – 18 years undergoing crisis situation was formed in order to prevent their dropout from an Arab school in Acre. DSPR (ICCI Galilee) issued 202 Loans for University Students each student receiving repayable \$600 per year for three years.

COMMUNITY HEALTH DSPR extended health services and activities in practically all of its Areas. In the **GAZA STRIP** the three health centers in Rafah, Shija'ia and Darraj operated to meet the increasing demands on the health sector. With 23,538 families registered and 65,475 registered children of whom 2,020 are new registrants, the centers' medical staff examined close to 20,000 patients and managed over 17,000 laboratory tests to the period ending on 30/9/2007. Because of the iron deficiency in Gaza children, 2,304 of them received iron supplementation. A Mobile Dental Clinic continues to operate in the Gaza Strip; so far this year over 4,000 persons were examined by the dentist of whom 1,528 are first-time comers. Close to 1,000 expecting mothers were screened by the Dental Clinic with over 80% of them needing treatment. ACT Appeal MEPL71 has helped in the temporary employment of a General Practitioner, a Dentist, three Staff Nurses and other support personnel to enable the continuity of the quality medical work extended to the population. On health education, 79 women attended two courses on Reproductive Health in two localities, Khan Younis and Gaza. The Staff of the three Centers attended over 400 sessions in educational awareness on topics ranging from psychological care to the protection of the environment. In **JORDAN** the Gaza and Madaba Clinics served over 11,000 patients in the three quarters of 2007. In addition, the Jordan DSPR undertook an intensive program of Health Education which reached so far this year over 1,372 women, especially housewives, working women and young girls. In **GALILEE** a ground breaking Inter-National Conference on Gynecology and Obstetrics was held on October 24-26 and was very well attended with over 150 top medical professionals in their fields from the Palestinian Territories,

Israel and elsewhere. The event was cosponsored by the French Embassy, DSPR – ICCI and by the French Hospital in Nazareth. This was an occasion for Palestinian gynecologists, many of whom are women, to attend.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING DSPR prides itself that many of its projects are aimed at leaving a long term impact on the communities it serves. It also strives to build the capacities of the communities themselves and its own staff. In the **WEST BANK** the hallmark of the program is the construction of the much needed Water Cisterns. It is expected that 45 Water Cisterns will be constructed this year benefiting 50 families and 2 schools comprising altogether over 1,065 beneficiaries. In the Aroub Refugee Camp Children Center, the Women Committee has been empowered to run the Center which has a library and a computer center and runs a variety of artistic and cultural activities. Besides, the Women Committee supervises the fitness center and a kindergarten with 52 children. In **GALILEE** 2 Youth Leadership Projects are being conducted in Nazareth's Coptic Community Center (30) and in the Village of Rama (40). These youngsters aged 16 to 24 years undergo a series of training sessions on Human Rights, Democracy and Civil Society issues. An Interfaith Youth Leadership Program in Haifa gather 40 youth both Christians and Muslims on issues pertaining to building a joint vision to the future of society. As part of its contribution to the community, DSPR-ICCI offered 9 Small Business Loans and is proceeding to help the Village of Deir Hanna with the construction of a 800 meter Agricultural Road to enable farmers to reach their plots during the rainy winter months. In **LEBANON** the Sabra Refugee Camp community added a 14-member youth musical group thanks to the efforts of DSPR – JCC. Three volunteers from Sabra attended a 2-week art and music workshop. Meanwhile in Dbayeh Refugee Camp, a JCC Club was established to care about the Camp's community and improve its human, cultural and physical environment. The youth group elected an Executive Committee and made contacts with UNRWA with various demands in favor of the Camp. There are plans for sports activities to take place but permission by UNRWA is yet to come. With the unfortunate developments in Nahr El Bared Refugee Camp and the displacement of its residents, young people were recruited to help the displaced. In **JORDAN** a variety of workshops were conducted to enhance community responsiveness to various challenges. 1162 Youth attended 53 workshops on how to plan for their future; 1077 women attended 55 workshops on issues pertaining to Children; well over 3450 families were reached in 8 Refugee Camps with 37 workshops on camp environmental awareness; Health Education workshops saw the participation of 1372 women, youth and children in 65 workshops that covered drugs, food, contagious disease, cancer among other topics. The Jordan DSPR-NECCCRW has supported 10 UNRWA Schools in overall hygiene and infrastructure maintenance in addition to preparing a Child Club in Zarqa Refugee Camp which is awaiting official permission to be launched. A permanent Exhibition of women's products from Vocational Training was set up at Jordan Area's central premises. Recently, some of these products were on exhibition in Thailand and earned some well deserved income. The traditional training in sewing and embroidery that was going on in Souf Refugee Camp has now been replaced by folklore carpet weaving and straw items. This is tourist-related and is being done in high quality which promises good to the trained women and to their families and communities. 37 women participated in a Micro Finance Workshop to encourage them to explore this possibility of empowerment. Jordan provided 19 commercial loans to various beneficiaries. In the **GAZA STRIP** the products of the Vocational Training Centers supplied 3 organizations with subsidized furniture, attesting to the high quality of the products and to the community links of DSPR – NECCCRW Gaza. A Sewing Cooperative is ongoing with 20 women whose monthly income averages \$125. Forty Six women were trained as community workers while the Staff undertook

Home Visits with the purpose of educating on hygiene, breastfeeding, environment among other topics. Over 20 sessions were conducted for 819 women on issues pertaining to the health of the community and the role of mothers and women. 12 women finished an Illiteracy course in cooperation with the Gaza Strip Red Crescent Society. There continues to be cooperation with other Societies that are interested in the Rehabilitation of the Community. Ongoing in-service training and workshops are held for our medical and para medical staff with Ministry of Health and other local health providers. 38 Staff Members participated in a variety of Capacity Building Activities covering the range of all topics that are needed in their work.

ADVOCACY AND NETWORKING All Areas of DSPR and the Central Office continue in active networking with other Church Related Organizations, local committees in Refugee Camps, Municipal and Local Councils, international and local partners, UNRWA and other public and civil society organizations. This networking is essential to our work and makes it more effective.

In spite of the harsh movement restrictions imposed by Israel, the **Gaza Strip Area Committee** received 38 international visitors and extended the well acknowledged caring hospitality. Staff members participated in a 5-day advocacy course offered by DanChurchAid in March of 2007 in Gaza City itself. Gaza's voice continues to be heard with the compassion of our colleague, Mr. Constantine Dabbagh, Executive Director particularly as the Gaza Strip is facing a crippling embargo imposed by the Israeli authorities on all commodities, including fuel and gas supplies. In coordination with Central Office, Gaza Area Committee with its Chairperson and Members has kept us in Central Office aware of developments that need the attention of the international community. The Gaza Area Committee has alerted our partners to the grim situation in the Gaza Strip and asked that they voice their concern on this situation to officials and others so as we can all avoid a major humanitarian crisis.

In the **West Bank**, the Area Committee has formed a Sub Committee to follow on the plan for launching an advocacy program. The West Bank continues to receive international delegations and in many instances arranges and facilitates their visits. An acknowledgement is in due place to our colleague Mr. Ramzi Zananiri, the Executive Director of the West Bank, who undertakes to ensure that applications for entry and exit in and out of Gaza to DSPR personnel as well as to international partners and visitors are made and followed up. West Bank continues to be part of the AIDA group of international Church Related Agencies operating in the Palestinian Territories.

Jordan has become the virtual welcoming meeting place for DSPR, its Round Table and all of our partners. The Jordan Area Committee with its Chairperson and all its Members, with the always accommodating colleague, Mr. Fares Swaiss, Executive Director, and with the active and enthusiastic involvement of the DSPR Chairperson, Mr. George Hazou who always makes our stay and that of our partners in Jordan an unforgettable experience. Partners who visit Jordan for meetings often visit some of our projects and activities. The Jordan Area Committee maintains excellent networking with the Department of Palestinian Affairs in Jordan's Foreign Ministry as well as with UNRWA and with the local Refugee Camp Committees and other societies and organizations serving in the same field.

Lebanon is active in networking and advocacy. A 3-week visit by Mrs. Sylvia Haddad, Executive Director, to Australia invited by the National Council of Churches has made headlines in the Church media as she toured from town to town and from Church gathering to another Church gathering. Ongoing meetings with UNRWA and with other NGOs working with Palestinian Refugees cover a range of topics from

lobbying to maintaining educational quality in UNRWA schools. Meetings with Heads of Churches were conducted and issues dealt with our work and with the conditions of Palestinian refugees. Lebanon hosts very many visiting delegations, including H.E. the Archbishop of Canterbury, a BBC film crew to Sabra and Shatilla and partners who are interested in more work in Lebanon. Radio Vatican conducted an interview with the Executive Director while the JCC Saida Center cooperated with the Norwegian FAFO in gathering data on conditions in Ain El Hilweh Refugee Camp.

In **Galilee**, visitors to Mary's town are always welcomed by the Area Committee its Chairperson Judge Khalil Touma who explains the unique situation in which the DSPR –I CCI finds itself as well as the situation of Palestinians in the Jewish State. Our colleague, Mr. Husam Elias, Executive Director, together with Ms. Helena, the office dynamo, follow up on networking with other organizations and welcome visitors and partners to Nazareth. Of special mention is that unlike other DSPR Area Committees, the unique position of Nazareth's Area Committee enables it to network with organizations across the borders that are willing and ready to work for a just and lasting peace, on the one hand and for bettering the rights of Palestinians living in the Jewish State.

DSPR Central Office

DSPR Central Office continues on its administrative and organizational tasks. Our diligent Finance Officer, Mr. George Stephan, has been entrusted with the important task of internal auditor in all Areas of DSPR. Ms. Fadya Salfiti is on a 3-month probation for the position of Program Development Officer. Ms. Hanan Turjman is the new Administrative Assistant and, like Ms. Salfiti, assumed her position on 1st of October 2007. Our long time colleague, Ms. Shereen Mousa has married on October 20th. We all rejoice for her and her husband and wish both all the best.

Relationships with Partners

Daily communications with partners, whether at their home base or while on visits to the region, are ongoing. DSPR attendance at various regional workshops and membership in partnership networks, such as that of the ICCO Steering Committee, takes place regularly. With the presence of partner's representatives in the region, such as Norwegian Church Aid, DSPR is always in consultation with them and is active in all related partnership activities and workshops. DSPR has participated in a number of specialized workshops outside the region such as those on micro finance initiated by Church of Sweden. KAIROS and United Church Canada and Church World Service USA have launched both Peace and Water Campaigns respectively. We were instrumental in the Central Office in facilitating the production of local olive wood symbols to crystallize the essence of both campaigns. A Canadian film crew visited with us to highlight the Peace Campaign. The Executive Director, on his part, visited some of our partners especially in Holland and USA and held meetings and talks on issues of importance to DSPR. We also took part, collectively, on the World Council of Churches Amman meeting and made interventions that were very well received.

DSPR is member of the ACT Forum locally and takes part in occasional consultations. We are also in constant contact with Jerusalem Interchurch Center and always coordinate relevant programs and activities. DSPR as part of MECC is always cooperative with the World Council of Churches and its initiatives for promoting peace in our region. At the local level, DSPR is in network with other Church Related Organizations in order to enhance delivery of services and to optimize performance.

Thanks for Your Support and Prayers

All in DSPR are committed to the continuing work through empowering partnership that will help us overcome the current bleak situation. MECC and its most distinguished and honored Presidents are a mainstay for all of us in our work. The Executive Committee of MECC and its ever caring General Secretary, Mr. Guirguis Saleh, are important reference and support for us. The support of our Partners is truly our mainstay. Our local Churches and their esteemed Heads are also supportive of us and our work.

I speak on behalf of all in DSPR when I send each and every one of you a note of thanks from the Holy City of Jerusalem, the place of Resurrection and from the town of Nativity, the place of birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May the coming commemoration of His Birth continue to sustain all of us and may your prayers for peace and stability in this region be answered in the New Year 2008.