



المجلس المركزي للكنائس في الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

VIII GA/IER 2

9th General Assembly
“So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (2 Cor 5:20)
26 – 30 November 2007
Paphos – Cyprus

Report
Of the International Ecumenical Relations
To the
MECC 9th General Assembly

**The Middle East Council of Churches
International Ecumenical Relations (IER)**

Detailed Assembly Report

Mandate & Objective

The International Ecumenical Relations (IER) was established in April 2004 following the MECC 8yh General Assembly. The Program is directly related to the General Secretary's office.

The IER Program aims at:

- a) ***Building relations with the wider ecumenical family, including churches, partners and specialized ministries and agencies, regional ecumenical councils and organizations.***
- b) ***Communicating the Council's news, policies and programs with the wider ecumenical family and organizations.***
- c) ***Sharing and exchanging information, concerns and issues of the region in order to develop and promote global solidarity.***
- d) ***Writing project proposals for fundraising the MECC General Secretariat's projects and its programs.***
- e) ***Attempting to interpret situations in the region of the Middle East with particular focus on the implications on churches***
- f) ***Coordinating and following up with MECC Executive Staff their responses/reports to funding partners according to signed agreements and guidelines received from the partners.***

Activities and Achievements

During the last four years, the International Ecumenical Relations was focusing its efforts on the following **mainline activities** which are listed below in more details:

- ***Organizing and facilitating the Annual Partners' Meetings, and pursuing constant communication and relation with Partners.***
- ***Preparing the 3-Year Plan of Action and Follow-up with Units, Departments and Partners on it.***
- ***Producing Annual MECC Narrative Report to partners***
- ***Producing Monthly Electronic (NewsBrief) on MECC activities***
- ***Organizing visitors' programs and receiving delegations in the region through MECC***
- ***Coordinating and communicating with partners on agreements and projects***
- ***Coordinating with the General Secretary and the MECC Units and departments on projects***
- ***Participating in some regional and international meetings***
- ***Organizing some ecumenical regional meetings of common concerns to churches***

Detailed Report

I) Annual Partners' Meeting and Partners' Relations

Relations with partners have been pursued through:

1) Annual Partner's Meeting:

The IER Program is responsible for the preparation and the organization of the annual partners' meeting and in direct cooperation with the General Secretariat office as well as partners. The organization includes: communication with partners on the agenda, discussing and finalizing the content of the agenda of the meeting in agreement with partners, deciding on the venue of the meeting in agreement with partners, preparing necessary documents for the meeting. The annual meeting is a process of reporting to partners on:

- The general activities of MECC General Secretariat activities as well as the MECC Units and departments.
- MECC Financial and Audit annual report
- Follow up on the 3-years plan of action
- Relations with partners.
- General discussions, evaluation, and comments

During the last four years, the MECC held three Partners' meetings in the following venues and dates:

Cairo – Egypt (19 – 22 May 2004)

Damascus – Syria (9 – 12 May 2005)

Jordan (2006)

Harisa – Lebanon (21 – 24 May 2007)

The annual partner's meeting is prepared and agreed on by the **MECC/Partners Core Group** who normally meets several months earlier to set the final agenda of the next partners' meeting.

2) Partners' Relations

Relations with partners have pursued through the following:

2.1) *Correspondence* and follow up on requests from the MECC on specific matters or queries.

2.2) Preparing and sending a *mid-year progress report* and *Annual report*

2.3) Reporting on specific conflict situations.

2.4) *Organizational Profile* was prepared to be shared with Partners when needed. This document is updated annually to provide exact information about the Council, its structure, programs, staff, and finances.

2.5) *Coordination Procedures, Reporting and Other Forms*

Based on recommendations made by partners to avoid duplication of activities between Units and Departments and needs identified by the senior staff during enlarged General Secretariat meetings, both in the past and at present, for a mechanism of coordination between Units and Departments and staff in charge, for change and improvement in the methodology of work in the Council, a document entitled "*Coordination Procedures*" was developed establishing a system and a mechanism that would allow joint planning and evaluation of programs and activities, thus meeting the desired results. In addition, to facilitate the work of the staff and respond to partners' requests an "*MECC Reporting Form*", an "*MECC Financial Request Form*", and an "*MECC Organizational Profile*" were worked out, to unify the reporting system of the MECC.

3) Strategic Plan:

The IER initiated a preliminary draft of a proposed Strategic Planning Framework (SPF) for the period 2007-2012. This Framework was collectively discussed and enriched by the MECC Senior Staff. It was also shared with the MECC Partners at their meeting in

Amman - Jordan, in May 2006 and was also circulated to the Heads of Churches for their feedback and input.

An external Consultant was identified to work on the detailed Strategic Plan and a proposed future new structure for the MECC. However, with the war on Lebanon in July 2006, the launching of the Strategic Planning was temporarily postponed. Later the external consultant also apologized. The General Secretary sent the paper to the Presidents of the Council for reflection and feedback; as well as to the Executive members. He also held constant consultation meetings with the Associates and Senior Staff, re-studied the SPF paper and developed it into a new document named: "*MECC Restructuring and Reprogramming*". The document was circulated, studied and approved by the Executive Committee in its last meeting of March 2007. The Executive Committee formed a special Committee of four of its members to follow up on the work of restructuring and prepare for the forthcoming Assembly.

II) Three-Year Plan of Action and Calendar

Based on the activities proposed by the MECC Units and Departments, the IER office works on compiling these activities in a *3-year plan of action*, which is shared and presented to partners as well as the Executive Committee members.

The IER works also on compiling the MECC *Yearly Calendar of Events* which is posted on the MECC website.

This 3-year plan is constantly updated to provide information and changes in the plan.

III) MECC Electronic Monthly (NewsBrief) & Communication

1) A monthly electronic newsletter in English under the name of "MECC News Brief", was initiated by the IER Program in August 2004 and has kept partners, churches, regional ecumenical councils, and individuals worldwide informed about MECC activities on monthly basis. The NewsBrief inform also about the situation in the region and its impact on the people in general and on the churches, in particular.

Since August 2004, (**39 issues**) were prepared and disseminated through emails in the region and worldwide. It is also estimated that (**600 names**) are listed on MECC data bank and mailing list who are receiving the News Brief.

This monthly newsletter relates about major ecumenical events and activities of the current month that are significant for the Council, the churches and the ecumenical movement in general. It is posted on the MECC website along with the other publications of the Council, and contributes to the development of international and ecumenical relations. The NewsBrief has been generally appreciated by the wider ecumenical family and has been sought by many other readers. It is also posted on the MECC website:

www.mec-churches.org

2) Preparation of a Colored Brochure for the Council

In February 2005, a colored and informative brochure was prepared in close collaboration with the Communication Department. It is meant to provide important and necessary information about the Council to visitors and includes photographs of the MECC leadership, programs and activities.

3) With the Israeli war on Lebanon that started on July 12, 2006, the MECC office in Beirut focused much of its efforts on organizing the emergency response of the Council. The IER Program was involved in the process, in the formation of an emergency committee, in establishing functions, tasks and procedures for the committee as well as in the preparation and writing of the ACT Appeal.

The IER also took the responsibility of preparing daily updates on the situation in Lebanon during the hostilities. Information and input collected from the news, the MECC communicator and the ICNDR staff working on the emergency relief were shared with all the MECC and ACT partners. With the end of the hostilities, the Emergency Committee decided that the ICNDR will be responsible for a weekly update on the emergency relief and other activities.

IV) Visitor's Program & Coordination

1) The MECC IER in cooperation with the General Secretariat office and other Units and Departments organized and facilitated the program of visit for individual visitors, ecumenical groups and church delegations to the region of the Middle East. During the last four years, many partners, church and ecumenical delegations have visited the region (Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine) as an expression of solidarity with the churches and Christians living in the region. To name some and not all:

*The Presbyterian Church of USA,
The Global Ministries of the Church of the Netherlands,
Church World Service and the National Council of Churches in USA,
Mennonite Central Committee
Ecumenical German Delegation
Dan-Church Aid young politicians from Denmark,
Norwegian Church Aid group,
Church of Sweden group,
Bishop of Oslo and a delegation with him,
Archbishop of Canterbury and Anglican delegation
Representatives from Christian Aid in UK,
Kairos from Canada,
The General Secretary of the World Council of Churches,
The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI),
Action by Churches Together (ACT) evaluation team.*

A follow up report on these visits is circulated to Units and Departments, and published in the Monthly Electronic News Brief.

2) MECC Delegation Visit to Germany, December 12-18, 2004

The International Ecumenical Relations Program was part of the MECC four member delegation invited by the Evangelische Missionswerk in Germany (EMW). The visit aimed at advancing in discussions on partnership between the Churches and Missions in Germany, to share information and experiences on the different churches and MECC's work as well as information on the situation in the Middle East, its impact on the people in general and on Christian communities in particular. Short but intensive, the visit included meetings and encounters with church leaders, heads of organizations and missions in different cities in Germany.

The visit and the discussions were beneficial to both the churches in Germany and to the MECC and extremely important what regards partnership and collaboration between the two.

At the end of the journey, the following decisions were taken: a small working group of four members will come to the Middle East in June 2005 to hear and listen to the churches and the issues faced in the region and plan for the visit of a high level church delegation from Germany in 2006 as well as for an International Consultation on major regional issues that need to be addressed through advocacy. *(A detailed report of the visit, prepared by the IER, is available).*

V) Fundraising

Fundraising activities includes writing project proposals for the General Secretariat and its programs, as well as for the Council as a whole, if and when needed.

VI) Meetings & Conferences

Relations with European Churches and Networks, and related Consultations

In 2004, the International Ecumenical Relations program pursued the relations established with European churches and ecumenical networks years ago, for a continued collaboration around common concerns and mainly on the causes and human consequences of migration affecting the churches in both regions. These relations provide possibilities for collective advocacy vis-à-vis the European Union, what regards EU politics regarding the region as well as immigration and asylum policies affecting those seeking safer havens and better opportunities elsewhere. The International Ecumenical Relations has participated in and contributed with presentations to the following:

a) Consultation on Refugee Resettlement, April 19-20, 2004, Brussels

The Consultation organized by the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe aimed at promoting the recognition of resettlement as an instrument of refugee protection in Europe, as well as at identifying the conditions, instruments, chances and limits of refugee resettlement, knowing that the European Union is contemplating new regulations regarding the use of this instrument in Europe which could affect asylum policies. The International Ecumenical Relations director participated to this Consultation and contributed with a presentation on Issues and Concerns of the Middle East regarding resettlement. The MECC's contribution highlighted the need for resettlement for refugees who are in countries of temporary asylum who are not party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees or 1967 Protocol and who have no other alternative but to resettle in a third country, such as the Arab countries.

The Consultation came out with a variety of recommendations to NGOs, Governments and Churches (*A detailed report of the Consultation is available*).

b) The "Amman Process" Network Meeting, September 9-12, 2004, Lisbon, Portugal

The International Ecumenical Relations program was part of an MECC delegation with two members of the MECC Executive Committee to attend and participate in the annual meeting of the "Amman Process" network that was held in Lisbon, Portugal from September 9-12, 2004. The "Amman Process" is a process of inter-regional collaboration between the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and its Southern European member churches and the MECC since 1996: collaboration established within the framework of the 1995 Barcelona Conference and Declaration with respect to the promotion of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

The meeting was organized this year by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), as is the tradition that the two partners organize meetings alternatively in Europe and in the Middle East.

This process is important as it provides grounds for collective advocacy at the International and European levels not only on refugee and migration issues but on their root causes. It also provides an opportunity to the churches of the Middle East to report, inform and share experiences on the situation in the Middle East, on the importance of Christian presence and witness in the region and to explore possibilities of maintaining those in the Middle East region. The process allows the identification of common issues

of concern and the determination of possible joint actions and projects that could benefit the churches of the Middle East.

The Unit on Life & Service is handling this process.

c) European Conference on "International Migration, Globalization and Christian Ethics", October 22-24, 2004, Arnoldshain, Germany

Organized by the CCME on the occasion of its 40th anniversary, the Conference focused on International Migration trends and European Migration Policies in light of predominant security concerns and their impact on third countries. The Conference discussed trends and perspectives and their implications for the work of the churches.

International Ecumenical Relations Program contributed a paper on Commentaries about EU Politics with Third Countries, also relayed the MECC's congratulations and best wishes for continuous success and positive achievements for the CCME.

Discussions in small groups were centered on security policy and the criminalization of migration, migration and development, the impact of current migration policies on irregular migrants in Europe, on protection for asylum seekers and refugees and on the topic of uniting in diversity: churches and migrant communities.

d) Consultation on Ecumenism in the 21st Century, December 5-13, 2004

The International Ecumenical Relations Program participated in the Consultation on "Ecumenism in the 21st Century" organized by the World Council of Churches in Geneva, from November 30 to December 3, 2004. (106) participants representing churches, agencies/specialized ministries, regional and national councils of churches, Christian World Communions and international ecumenical organizations met in the spirit of St. John Chrysostom "For the peace of the whole world, the stability of the Holy Churches of God and for the Union of All, Let us pray to the Lord".

Participants agreed that it is time for change in the ecumenical movement since it is living and operating in a constantly changing world and many feel today that another world is possible.

The first consultation on the Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement called for a revitalization of the ecumenical movement. The Geneva Consultation established a vision for the ecumenical movement providing a special place for Christians to work for Christian unity, where open and ecumenically-minded culture is fostered in the lives of people and where ecumenical formation is a central focus at all levels of church life, locally and globally. Participants reaffirmed the theological basis of the ecumenical movement and recommended that a mapping of the programmatic work of ecumenical and denominational bodies be conducted. They also requested that the respective roles of the WCC, REOs and NCCs be clarified as well as the space and role of the Specialized Ministries/Agencies within the movement. The Consultation wished for an enhanced collaboration with Christian World Communions and asked for the exploration of possibilities for greater financial stability. A participant affirmed that the WCC is a privileged instrument and was entrusted with ensuring the coherence of the ecumenical movement. A continuation group was established at the end the Consultation, with 15 representatives of different constituencies. A final statement was issued at the end of the Consultation.

e) Participation in the Proposed Ecumenical Alliance for Development (PEAD) Middle East and Bossey Consultations

The IER Program participated in the Middle East Consultation on the Proposed Ecumenical Alliance for Development and Relief organized by the WCC/Middle East Desk in Beirut, Lebanon, from September 1-2, 2005. The proposed alliance is meant to

bring together churches and ecumenical development organizations/specialized ministries to work in the area of development cooperation, to increase effectiveness in overcoming poverty, injustice and the abuse of human rights.

The Beirut consultation brought together representatives from Middle East churches and the Middle East Council of Churches to discuss the new Alliance. Following extensive and positive discussions, participants agreed that the issues and concerns that are particular to the region should be taken into consideration by the Alliance. Among other issues shared, participants underlined the importance of the churches' visibility at a time when the Christian community is decreasing, the lack of understanding of the Middle East context by partners, the central role the WCC should have in the PEAD and its national and regional expressions, multilateral funding, the need for a coordinating mechanism, the relationship between the PEAD and ACT international, institutional and governance issues and the code of good practice

The IER Program represented the MECC General Secretary at the PEAD Consultation convened by the WCC, at the Bossey Ecumenical Center, December 1-2, 2005. Around 50 participants from different regions of the world, representing churches, ecumenical development organizations, national councils of churches and regional ecumenical organizations, as well as the World Council of Churches (WCC), Action by Churches Together (ACT), the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Ecumenical Loan Fund (ECLOF), reflected, shared views and visions of this new Alliance. The Consultation Document was studied and observations and recommendations made to clarify and enrich it. Priority steps were proposed for the near future to fine tune the PEAD document, inform all governing bodies concerned, and finalize the name of the Alliance. The current Steering Group will continue to manage the process before handing it out to the first PEAD Executive Committee.

MECC International Ecumenical Relations Program contributed to the Panel on "How the PEAD can add value to our work". The presentation highlighted both the positive aspects of the PEAD, and the concerns of the Middle East churches and the Middle East Council of Churches regarding the new Alliance.

f) MECC Consultation for Christian Humanitarian Service Organizations

This consultation organized by the MECC International Ecumenical Relations in collaboration with the Middle East Fellowship - USA, convened from November 24- 25, 2005, in Beirut/Lebanon. Around 30 representatives of Christian and church- related, national, regional and international organizations participated in this event.

The consultation aimed at establishing a common vision and strategy for relief and development in the Middle East, at establishing real partnership and collaboration between them and at exploring together the possibility of promoting inter-religious understanding for peace, through service.

Participants recognized that service is an expression of their Christian witness in the multi-faiths society they live in. They affirmed their common Christian values for upholding human dignity. They recognized they shared the same definition of development and aspirations to just development and peace in the region and worldwide. They affirmed their will to work in cooperation, coordination and collaboration with each other and established guidelines for their collaboration. They proposed that the MECC be the facilitator of their coming together and formed a core group to work on

the elaboration of the guiding principles of collaboration and code of conduct. *(A detailed report of the Consultation is available)*

In light of the next consultation organized for both Christian and Muslim Humanitarian Service Organizations entitled "Humanitarian Service towards Common Living in Justice & Peace (scheduled December 1-2, 2005 and postponed to March 1-2, 2006) to promote dialogue and discussions for collaboration between them towards just development and peace, participants agreed that they needed to find the common values with Muslim Organizations serving the poor and underlined the importance of undertaking joint ventures and of working together for peace.

VII) Evaluation & Vision

It is possible to underline the benefits the Council gained from this work. However, the potential of the Program needs yet to be developed and used in the following aspects and visions:

- 1) Deepening the relationships with ecumenical partners through visits and the exchange of information and communication. This is a learning process which is mutually beneficial. Partnership requires sustainable process of communication, dialogue, exchange of information and engagement.
- 2) Supporting the General Secretary office with documents, materials, flow of international and regional information and above all making specific initiatives for fund raising projects which may enhance the ecumenical witness of MECC in the region.
- 3) Following up on consultations with churches in the West and in the East on issues of common concerns; such as Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, and advocacy work for Iraqis and Palestinians Christians.
- 4) Developing an "advocacy" work for MECC through communication and producing papers on specific issues of common concern and interest for churches and Christians; such as the situation of Christians in the Middle East, the Christian presence in the Middle East.
- 5) Reinforcing internal coordination between Units, Programs and Departments; especially in the forthcoming restructuring plan which requires more focus on issues.
- 6) Planning to produce an Arabic version of the monthly electronic News Brief. The IER already started this plan but was suspended for cost of translation.

Conclusion

The International Ecumenical Relations Program has initiated, established and developed relations with local, regional and international churches, ecumenical networks and other organizations. The IER Program has taken pleasure in establishing as good relations as possible with all the MECC partners and looks forward to maintaining these relations, for the benefit of the churches in the Middle East and those they are called to serve.

The MECC NewsBrief has fostered these relations by providing MECC news, thus creating renewed interest in the Council and its activities. The Program is often contacted for more information on a variety of issues and topics to which it is responding as needed.

Razek Siriani

Director

International Ecumenical Relations