

The Middle East Council of Churches The Ecumenical Relief Service Program Program Report, 2004 – 2007

“ which of these three , do you think , proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” he said the one who showed mercy on him. Go do like wise “ Luke 10 : 36-37.

The Ecumenical Relief Service Program (ERS) of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) was started in 1991 as the Council's arm to reach out to people in crisis and disasters all over the Middle East. **In 2003**, the Iraq Relief and Rehabilitation Program (IRRP) was established in Iraq to help with the aftermath of the American invasion, and it started helping people who were affected by the war. A detailed report was presented to this esteemed assembly in December of 2003 covering the work of the Program in Iraq during that year.

In 2004 the Program continued to work in Iraq under very difficult circumstances. It also extended its services to residents in Iraq who sought refuge in Jordan.

In Iraq

The Program continued the implementation of MECC / ACT Appeal MEIQ 41 which started in 2003 and aimed for rehabilitation of schools, hospitals and outpatient clinics, and also for distribution of food and non-food items, as well as medicines, specially in North Iraq where the security situation was much better than in other areas.

In April and May of 2004 the security situation deteriorated badly and the Program had to slow down its activities, till November 2004 when the IRRP Church Committee was revised and given extra responsibilities to continue the implementation of the Appeal MEIQ41 under the supervision of the Finance Committee, and I was appointed as Program Coordinator.

By the end of 2004, the following were accomplished:

- 1) Rehabilitation of three Community Health Centers in Mousel, related to the Mousel Governorate Health Department.
- 2) Providing food to 8 hospitals in Mousel and 2 hospitals in Karkouk.
- 3) Providing food and non-food relief items including children cloths in Mousel, Karkouk and Baghdad. Total number of beneficiaries 5000 persons.
- 4) Overseeing the implementation of two water purification projects in Najaf governorate funded by the Diakonie of Germany.
- 5) Providing relief supplies food and non-food items to 1000 families who were displaced from Falluja to Baghdad
- 6) Distribution of 1000 school kits to children from all the Churches in Baghdad.

In Jordan

MECC Amman Office started an ERS Assistance Program with other NGO's to help the refugees who came out of Iraq with the beginning of the war in March 2003, and who were received by the UNHCR in two camps on the Jordanian/Iraqi borders, 350 km east of Amman. ERS was providing food and non-food items on a monthly basis to 1585 refugees most of them were of a third country nationality. This assistance continued in 2004. Food and non-food items were bought in Amman and transported to the Rawshed camp on the borders. This Program was implemented with and through the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization and funded through the MECC / ACT Appeal MEIQ 41.

In 2005

MECC/ERS Program continued to help the internally displaced people inside Iraq paying more attention to the Churches and their needs. The Churches had felt that the MECC/ ERS was giving more assistance and paying more attention to others, and not much to the Churches; they have felt marginalized or forgotten, so more assistance was directed to them.

On the other hand, the security situation deteriorated further and many Iraqis, including a large number of Christians, started to leave Iraq to other (than Jordan) neighboring countries. This compelled the Program to include in its activities assistance to Iraqi refugees in the neighboring countries.

In Iraq

Completing the Appeal MEIQ41.

MECC/ ACT Appeal MEIQ41 was completed early 2005; the last phase of this Project was to distribute 10,500 units of school uniforms, school stationeries and supplies as well as winter cloths for children in schools ages 4- 18. All were in Church-related schools.

The Development and Peace Project, the Canadian Catholic Organization .

The first part of this project started in November 2004 by providing relief items to the Falluja IDP's. As it is known, 2,500 families were displaced from Falluja to Baghdad and its surroundings. MECC Staff and Committee identified 5 centers for the IDP's and were assigned 1000 families to help with food and non-food items.

The second part of this project was to provide relief supplies, food and non-food items to 9 organizations 2 of them were government-related (Social Ministry Orphanages) and 7 were church-related institutions. The total number of beneficiaries was 313. Also some medicines were provided to one church-related outpatient clinic in Baghdad.

The third part of this project was to help in rehabilitation, renovation and equipment of 3 church-related organizations, all in Baghdad.

School Kits Program, Church World Service (CWS)

6,300 school kits from CWS were received in Baghdad in May 2005. The project was implemented in October, after schools' opening, through the Churches and Church-related schools. A total number of 6,300 children benefited from this program.

Churches' Empowerment Projects, Dan Church Aid

Projects to empower and strengthen the ministry and presence of the Iraqi Churches were implemented in 2005, such as:

- 1) Opening computer training centers
- 2) Providing Equipments, furniture, educational materials and supplies to Church-related institutions such as: clinics, homes for the elderly, schools , hospitals and others. A total number of 13 projects.

In Jordan

In 2005, the MECC Amman Office continued the implementation of the MECC/ ACT Appeal MEIQ51 and provided assistance of food and none-food items to the refugees on the Jordanian/Iraqi borders (Rawshed Camp). Monthly parcels were sent to these refugees through the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization. Though some of the families were resettled in a third country but many were still waiting, and we had to continue providing assistance till June of 2005 when the Appeal was ended before the appointed time due to shortage of funds.

In 2006

MECC/ERS Program continued to work **in Iraq** under more difficult circumstances, giving more in fact all attention to the Churches. Indeed, all the projects that were implemented were Church projects, and some were implemented through the Churches.

This year, through a grant provided by the Middle East Fellowship, we started a social assistance project to the most needy families in Baghdad, Mousel , Karkouk and Basra. All the Churches benefited from this project. A total number of 485 families in the above mentioned cities did benefit from the project.

Also, it was possible to provide a small quantity of medicines to some Church-related clinics in Baghdad, which were bought locally through a grant received from the Christian World Service of New Zealand.

In Jordan.

This year we were able to give social assistance to Iraqi refugees through the local Churches in Jordan who were already looking after the Iraqis, these Churches are:

- 1) The Latin Bishopric of Jordan.
- 2) The Greek Catholic Bishopric of Jordan.
- 3) The Syrian Orthodox Church of Amman.
- 4) The Greek Orthodox Bishopric of Jordan.
- 5) The Presentation of the Lord, Greek Orthodox Church in Jordan
- 6) The Sacred Heart Parish of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Amman, Jordan.

Contacts were made by MECC Amman Office with the Churches to submit an estimated number of the most needy Iraqi families within their circles. Distribution was made to the Churches according to the number of families they have submitted. A total number of 810 families benefited from this project. The majority of the Churches distributed the fund in cash, only two of them bought food relief and distributed the food to families because they felt that this way they can help more families. This project was fully funded by MISSIO, the German Catholic Organization.

We also have received this year, from Church World Service (CWS), relief supplies in kind: food and none-food items such as school kits, health kits and canned chicken. Though we had closed our work at the refugees' camp on the Jordanian/Iraqi borders, we distributed some of these kits to the children in the camp. But most of the project assistance went to the Churches in Jordan, and some were sent to South Lebanon in the Summer of 2006. Over 2,500 children did benefit from this project.

Around Al Fiter feast (Ramadan) we were able to provide for the children in the Rawshed Camp winter training suits with a grant received from one PCUSA congregation. 123 children benefited from this grant.

In Syria

After the attacks with explosives on the churches in Iraq in August of 2004, a large number of Christian Iraqis came to Syria among the influx of Iraqi refugees to this country. MECC/ERS started looking for ways to help those Iraqis, true some of them were OK financially but most of them needed help.

The Churches in Syria were helpful and supportive to these Christian Iraqis who are connected to them. In 2006, ERS was able to help 1,600 families with a grant from MISSIO of Germany.

MECC Office in Damascus held several meetings with Church representatives and discussed the possibilities of the Program's implementaion. Again, MECC sought to implement this Program's assistance through the Churches .The Churches which were already involved in ministries to the Iraqis were:

- The Chaldean
- The Syrian Orthodox
- The Syrian Catholic
- The Greek Orthodox

Based on the number of families who were registered or known to these Churches, the grant was distributed accordingly. The Chaldean who had the largest number of Iraqi refugees bought food and none-food supplies and distributed them to the large number of families. The other Churches gave cash assistance to help these families in facing the daily life demands. The Churches reported back commenting that the need is much greater and more assistance to the Iraqis is needed.

In Lebanon

The number of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon increased as of 2004. Though the Lebanese government had more restrictions on Iraqis entering Lebanon than Syria and Jordan, a good number made their way through to Lebanon. In 2006, again with the MISSIO Grant we were able to help 452 families through the following Churches in Lebanon who already had a ministry to the Iraqis,

- The Chaldean Catholic Bishopric of Lebanon.
- The Syrian Orthodox Bishopric of Mount Lebanon.
- The Syrian Catholic Bishopric of Lebanon .

Some of these families were given cash assistance through the Churches and others were given relief items such as food and none-food items and medicines.

This year, and as of January 2007

MECC / ERS took a new direction of paying more attention to the Iraqi refugees in the neighboring countries: Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

The bad security situation in the last two years pushed more Iraqis outside Iraq. The security plan which was to be implemented as of January 2007 with hopes that it will improve the security, did not accomplished much; in fact the building of the security walls increased the tension and divided the people of Baghdad more and more

Another important factor developed this year, a positive one at least for the time being, that is the attention given by the international community for the massive movement of Iraqi refugees which was declared as the largest one since 1948. During the last four years this issue was forgotten, marginalized, denied or not of concern to the international community. Now, for the first time the international community including MECC Partners became very concerned about the Iraqi refugees in the neighboring countries, an issue MECC was trying to deal with and advocate for, since 2003, thanks to some of our partners who supported our efforts.

Two of MECC Partners, MISSIO and Diakonie of Germany, indicated their interest and support for MECC work with Iraqi refugees and IDP's and provided grants directly to the ERS Program to assist the Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the IDPs in Iraq .

The First grant from MISSIO will provide cash assistance to 2,000 families, 500 families in each country. The implementation of this project started in July of 2007 and should be completed by the end of the year.

The second grant from Diakonie will also support Iraqi refugees in Lebanon and Syria. It will provide food parcels to 1,230 families in Syria: 630 in Damascus and 600 families in Aleppo, Hassake and Deir Az Zoor. The other part of the Diakonie grant will provide medical assistance to Iraqi refugee families, already 73 cases benefited from this grant and this will continue till the end of 2007. As for Lebanon, the Diakonie project did provide food parcels, medical and social assistance to 706 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon through MECC/UNHCR Program in Beirut.

Another Appeal, MEIQ71 was issued by ACT upon a request from MECC and other partners working with Iraqi refugees. The Appeal was issued in July 2007 and funds started coming in September. The implementation of the Appeal started in mid October. A total number of 3,000 families will be supported in Iraq, Syria and Jordan, plus a good number of children and young people who will be supported with schooling and other educational matters such as computer training and basic education. A detailed report on the implementation of this ACT Appeal will be available early 2008.

Also this year, as in 2006, the Middle East Fellowship has provided another grant to Iraqi refugees and IDP's in Iraq and the neighboring countries: Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. A total number of 600 families were supported through this grant. The project was completed in September 2007.

A detailed report covering the work of the ERS Program, by year and by country, is available upon request from the MECC / ERS Office.

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