



MECC News Brief

Issue January – June 2009

The Task Force takes crucial Steps.

MECC has been under serious financial constraints since November 2009. The Emergency Executive committee meeting that was held in January 2009 to deal with the situation has commissioned a Task Force to take concrete measures in order to rescue the council. The Task Force met every two weeks for the past four months in order to deal immediately with the financial and administrative constraints. Downsizing was deemed inevitable. A certain number of employees were released and will receive their full indemnities by the end of June. Moreover, all the activities and programs of the Council had to be put on what came to be called “a survival mode” in order to reduce drastically the running costs of the council.

In addition, the Task Force was asked to think about the future restructuring of the Council. This was to respond to the challenges posed partly by our partners concerning the government, leadership and ownership of the Council. The ultimate goal was to insure that MECC may be revitalized as the leading instrument of ecumenical activity in the Middle East, and also that it may become solvent and administratively viable again.

The outcome of the Task Force will be presented to [the next MECC Executive Committee meeting that will be held in Beirut 15-16 July 2009.](#)

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The Task Force

is composed of four Executive Committee members representing the four families of the Council in addition to the General Secretary. The MECC Associate General Secretaries and one consultant who joined the team later to help specifically on the issue of restructuring and the interim administrative measures.

Beyond Silence – a Child' World

To raise awareness on issues of uprooted people and migrants, and advocate for their rights to live in safety and dignity, the Diakonia and Social justice Unit is publishing an illustrated story book named *Beyond Silence – a Child' World* and soon will be distributed to churches, NGOs and concerned groups to raise awareness and compassion towards refugees.

**The Diakonia & Social Justice unit will celebrate
The Refugee Day on the 20th of June
Together with UNHCR and national, international organizations,**

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR THE UNITY OF THE CHURCHES 18-25 January 2009

The MECC celebrated the Week of Prayer for the unity of the Churches from 18-25 January 2009.
The Faith and Unity unit compiled a prayer booklet and this year it was on the theme:

“There is one hope to which God has called you”

In Lebanon:

Bishop Boulos Matar one of the Presidents of the Council presided the opening liturgy that was served by the Antonine University Choir in addition to the MECC General Secretary and church hierarchs.

In addition to the liturgies, lectures and prayers, the week of prayer for the Unity of the Churches included the following events:

- A display that introduces the different churches during the weekends.
- A concert of choirs representing the different theological institutes that are members of ATIME.
- An Ecumenical Youth gathering organized by the WSCF focusing on the unified Arabic translation of the Lord's Prayer and the Credo.
- A joint recital of an Orthodox and a Maronite choirs.

MECC expresses its gratitude TO THE CHURCHES IN LEBANON FOR THEIR IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION IN PROVIDING THE PRINTING OF THE PRAYER BOOKLETS, PAMPHLETS AND ALL OTHER MATERIALS.

In Egypt:

The inaugural day, that was hosted by the Coptic orthodox Church, gathered the Heads of the all the Churches in Egypt or their representatives, Rev. Dr. Safwat El Bayadi one of the Presidents of the Council, the MECC General Secretary in addition the participation of the ambassador of the Vatican in Egypt Bishop Mikhael Fitzgerald who spoke on the theme of the week of prayer.

The Fifth day was marked by the presence of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III with a huge number of bishops, priests and lay people in addition to the members of the committee of the week of prayers in Egypt.

Every day was hosted by a different church but every time the speakers were from all the Christian families and they tackled the theme via lectures, presentations and round tables in addition to prayers and songs.

Will Syria host the next WCC GA?

The initiative to send the invitation to host the next assembly was taken by all local Churches in Syria headed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East. Eng Samer Laham, director of Ecumenical Relations and Development at the Greek orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and director of MECC office in Syria has prepared the program for the WCC delegation. It began with an ecumenical gathering at the Patriarchate of Antioch with the heads of all the churches present in Syria who expressed their support this initiative and the very unique important elements that Syria will bring to such gathering and the impact on the Christian presence and the Christian Muslim relations.

The delegation spent four days in Syria visiting the local churches, ministers, facilities of the meeting places and other hotels that can accommodate about 4000 guests. The Syrian government offered all possible help to host the assembly in its facilities as it offered IBLA Al Sham Conference Palace or at the International fair ground of Damascus to be the venue of the assembly. The delegation were highly impressed with the huge facilities available in Syria today in addition to the preparedness of all concerned ministries to put their facilities under the disposal of the assembly such as ministries of health, tourism, information, transport and internal affairs.

Challenges facing Syrian Women

MECC OFFICE IN DAMASCUS HAS ORGANIZED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NCA ON WEDNESDAY JUNE 4TH 2009, A NON OFFICIAL BRAIN STORMING MEETING WITH DIFFERENT NON-GOVERNMENTAL CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS TO DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES FACING THE SYRIAN WOMEN IN ORDER TO FORMULATE REGIONAL PROJECT IN THE FUTURE. THE MAIN PAPER THAT WAS DISCUSSED IN THE COURSE OF THE MEETING WAS THE UN RESOLUTION 1325 RELATED TO WOMEN.

THE PATRIARCHATE OF ANTIOCH HAS OFFERED ITS PREMISES OF THE HOLY CROSS HALLS TO FACILITATE CONVENING THE MEETING. MECC HAS SENT INVITATIONS TO ALL LOCAL CHURCHES IN DAMASCUS TO NOMINATE CANDIDATES AND TO DIFFERENT ACTIVIST WOMEN FROM ISLAMIC ENTITIES. THREE WOMEN FROM NCA JORDAN AND NORWAY PARTICIPATED THE MEETING WHICH ENDED AT 5.00 PM ON THE SAME DAY.

The MECC celebrated with its entire constituency and friend's network

The Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine

at St.Elias Maronite Church, Beirut- Lebanon on 10 June at 5 pm. The participants received and recited the prayer sent by the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem.

ATIME focuses on the role of media in education

The Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East organized its annual conference on 20 March at the evangelical school of theology in Cairo, Egypt on the theme:

"The Church & The Role of Media in Education ".

The 170 participants present, highlighted the educational role of the media and forwarded a recommendation to the Deans of their seminaries to organize future seminars around that topic.

The Role of Eastern Christianity and its Future

The MECC General Secretary had a very important contribution at the conference organized jointly by the Doha Center for religious Dialogue and the Syrian League that was held in Beirut last march. Mr. Guirges Saleh presented a paper on “*The Role of Eastern Christianity and its Future*” where he highlighted also the impact of the west. Many prominent figures from academic, religious and political spheres took part in the conference that pondered on the religious, ethnic and confessional diversity in the Arab World.

Visits to the Heads of the churches

The MECC General Secretary visited the Heads of the Churches in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt during the months of April & May. During these visits, Mr. Guirges Saleh informed them about the progress on the new structure and the importance of dialogue in addition to some of the priorities that the council will work on in the future.

For a Global Solidarity with Iraqi Christians

The MECC Beirut office played an active role in the preparations and implementation of the meeting that took place in Beirut 9-12 February of all the heads of Churches in Iraq.

This WCC initiative aimed at stopping the emigration from Iraq and supporting its just cause.

Moreover, The MECC General Secretary delivered a speech on the need “For a Global Solidarity with Iraqi Christians”. Mr. Saleh accompanied the participants in their visits to all the heads of the churches in Lebanon.

Biblically Oriented Diakonia

Mrs. Seta Hadeshian the director of the Diakonia & Social Justice Unit, presented the diaconal work of MECC in the Middle East at the WCC Consultation on Diakonia in Bucharest - Romania.

A Major recommendation was to organize regional training workshops and conferences for the churches and seminaries to develop a more theology oriented and biblically based Diakonia.

The St. Sharbel Health Center presented, on 16 May, to the MECC General Secretary the Center’s logo as a token of appreciation to work of Middle East Council of Churches in Beirut.

“The Christian and Muslim Youth & the Challenges of Coexistence”

Is the theme of the two Christian and Muslim youth conferences that MECC will organize in Egypt (4-8 August) & in Jordan (9-14 August 2009).

These conferences will be the 14th & 15th inter-religious conference that the MECC has organized in last five years.

Supporting Iraqi refugees in Syria in partnership with ACT and Mercy Corps

The MECC staff in Damascus and Aleppo has achieved 90% of the planned activities to support Iraqi refugees in The program has targeted very vulnerable Iraqi families living in different Syrian provinces in coordination with local churches and some Islamic entities. The program that is funded by ACT will be closed by the end of July 2009. The program has targeted the following number of beneficiaries:

600 students attended different vocational activities such as; hair styling, English language, ICDL computer training, Life Skills, Cosmetic, sewing etc.

520 Iraqi women attending health awareness behavior in the host country,

1500 hygiene kits were distributed in Damascus, Aleppo and the North of Syria.

We should note that all beneficiaries are both Christians and Moslems. The MECC activities enabled beneficiaries to experience a very healthy atmosphere of love and tolerance. Iraqis, who can not sit together or deal with each other in Iraq today, were able to rehabilitate such broken relations resulted from the war and occupation.

The second program that is in Partnership with Mercy Corps, will enable **640 students** to attend different Vocational activities mainly in Damascus. The project will be closed by the end of July 2009. MECC has achieved 95% of the targeted numbers so far,

“Let us Celebrate Easter Together”.

The St. Ignatios the Antiochian Ecumenical Gathering that is composed of 14 Christian youth groups and movements in Lebanon met on May 24, 2009 to pray together and contemplate on the meaning of Easter and to call for the unification of Easter celebrations. The General Secretary of MECC Mr. Guirges Saleh and other dignitaries participated in that event in addition to youth and students.

This gathering has organized a series of ecumenical youth events under the theme:

“*The Christian Presence*”

Father Gabi Hashem the Director of Faith and Unity of MECC had been directly involved in providing the theological and ecumenical frame of the different phases of that project.

MECC/UNHCR partnership program

The UNHCR/MECC partnership program for refugees, is a joint collaboration which is going on now for 34 years.

Counseling, home visits, medical follow ups, service to refugee prisoners, referrals and orientation to educational or vocational training institutions were provided as integral part of the program.

From January till May 2009, **Diakonia & social Justice Unit offered services to 1757 Iraqi refugees**, in addition to some Somalis, Eritreans and other nationalities which brings to **a total of 2 642 refugees**.

Our Lady Dispensary in Sad El Baoucherieh, under the auspices of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Lebanon, continues to assist many stateless and refugee persons in the aim of promoting their integration into the Lebanese society and their development towards self reliance.

From the period of January 2009-to today **this center served 589 persons**

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