



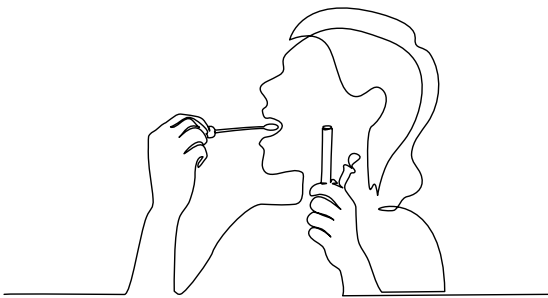
NEWS

FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SERVICE TO PALESTINIAN
REFUGEES – MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Sept 2020

DEAR PARTNERS, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES,

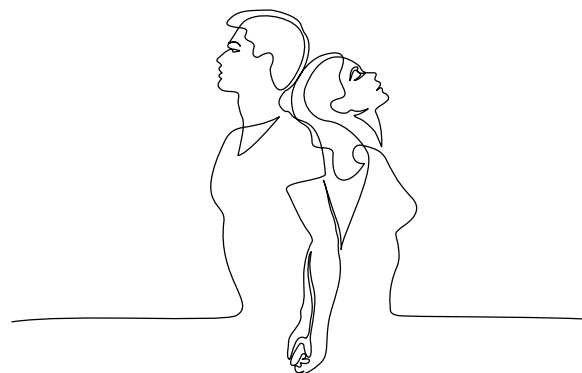
The world is still in a situation of absolute crisis, and so is the Middle East. While Beirut is trying to recover from the catastrophe of its port explosion, the first four cases of virus infection occurred for a family of four in a crowded refugee camp in Gaza. The virus was under control in Gaza since infections started in March across Palestine and Israel. All reported cases were in the quarantine areas close to the border with Egypt and those entering from Erez Checkpoint were all tested and those with symptoms were quarantined. The system of control worked for Gaza until this past week. Gaza is now on complete lockdown till Monday 31st of September. It is expected that the lockdown will be extended.



Despite increasing numbers of virus infected cases as 20 new cases were reported by Thursday, August 27th, the militant confrontation between Israel and the Palestinian political factions in Gaza is ongoing. On the morning of August 28th, Israeli military planes attacked positions of Hamas after a number of rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip to the Israeli areas in close proximity to the Gaza borders. Since then Hamas-dispatched hot balloons caused scores of fires on the Israeli side of the border. Qatari and Egyptian mediation between Israel and Hamas, the Islamist political movement in control of the Gaza Strip, has not yet borne fruit. The Qatari efforts at negotiation between Israel and Hamas finally succeeded, on the eve of Monday, August 31st, as the two sides agreed to restore calm. Fuel will once again be allowed into Gaza to support electricity generation and other necessities. Gaza fishermen can throw their nets in Mediterranean waters up to 15 nautical miles. The

Hamas-dispatched hot balloons into Israel will stop. Hopefully this development will lead to focus the attention on the spreading coronavirus among the population of the Gaza Strip. As of Monday, August 31st, there are 280 active cases in the Gaza Strip with 99 new cases on Monday and 4 deaths. According to medical sources, there are only one hundred twenty ventilators in the hospitals of the Gaza Strip. Spiralling of infections would lead to the collapse of the health system and to the worsening of the socio-economic situation of the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Welfare Ministry speaks of 70% of Gaza families as aid-dependent including for food. This means that over 250,000 families are experiencing either poverty or deep poverty. The hermetic Israeli-imposed siege continues to make life ever more difficult for the population. We continue to pray for the siege to be lifted and for the peace to be restored and for hostilities to stop. Together with our Gaza colleagues, DSPR Central Office will monitor closely the developments and will update accordingly.

The Lebanon situation continues to be in our hearts. What happened to Beirut, the 'Paris of the Middle East' is hard to imagine. The response of both MECC, with Dr. Souraya Bashealany and Sylvia Haddad of DSPR-JCC Lebanon was spontaneous and heartwarming. This response has reaffirmed the heavy responsibility that falls on the shoulders of those who lead the MECC at this time. The ACT Alliance Appeals issued by MECC and DSPR as members of ACT Lebanon Forum are intended to address and redress some of the woes and sad repercussions of the Beirut port explosion that has affected thousands of people across the Lebanese capital.





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The explosion was an occasion in which all those who care about humanity came together and irrespective of religious, national and other particular identifications stood in solidarity with Beirut and its people. A Rapid Response Appeal has been submitted both by MECC and DSPR Lebanon, prior to the explosion, to deal with the repercussions of the pandemic with infections on the rise throughout Lebanon. (Links to this Appeal and the other active Appeals due to Covid-19 in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine are attached below.)

DSPR IN JORDAN

Fares Swais, our executive director colleague of DSPR-NECCCRW Jordan briefed DSPR on the virus situation in the Kingdom of Jordan. The infection cases started around March 18 but were mostly contained to incoming cases from Syria and the land borders of the country that were placed in quarantine. After months of successful containment the virus reached the centers of the population with cases now standing at 1,800 and with 15 deaths. The government reverted to the strict measure of forbidding population movement with Friday curfews and hermetic closure of the areas where the virus recorded several cases.

The virus with the containment measures have had dire economic and social effects. The marginalized and already impoverished population groups are the hardest hit. Like in other countries of the region, inaccessibility to work hit the livelihood of thousands of families. The government shored up its welfare intervention and came to the aid of designated hard hit families. DSPR and other Church and Civil Society organizations see themselves as part of the efforts to tend to those families and individuals most affected. A new ACT Alliance appeal on Covid19 has been issued which covered not only Jordan but also Palestine and Lebanon. Members of the ACT Forums in the different countries cooperated with ACT Alliance Regional Office in Amman and Jerusalem to come out with the Appeal.

DSPR Jordan continues with its planned activities and participates in virtual meetings and consultations. In the periodic updates that DSPR Jordan sends out

regularly, the different activities and the support received from different partners are covered. One of the partnership developments has been



DSPR Jordan and Embassy of Ireland in Amman signed the agreement of grants

a new relationship established with the Embassy of the Republic of Ireland in Amman to target the economic development of women at the Jerash Palestinian refugee camp, north of Amman. The core of the activity is the 'Production Kitchen' equipped with the needed utensils and materials essential to hygienic food production. The project also includes training component for around 400 women on topics related to food production, hygiene conditions, safety, packing, and marketing. There will be networking with specialized sectors such as universities, The Vocational Training Institute in order to ensure that DSPR Jordan is supported in this activity with specialized trainers.

DSPR IN GAZA

Even if Gaza had not suffered from the spread of the virus during the first few months since March, nevertheless the continuing hermetic closure of the Gaza Strip by Israel had extolled high tolls of unemployment with over fifty percent of the Labor Force out of work. Close to 80% of the Gaza population is aid supported which is quite difficult to imagine as it reflects the collapse of local economy and the desperation of hundreds of thousands of families. On Friday, 28th August, our executive director



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colleague in Gaza, Dr. Issa Tarazi, briefed DSPR that the cumulative number of Covid19 cases in the Gaza Strip has reached 192 since March with 117 active cases of which 80 are within the crowded population centers and the rest with quarantined returnees on the borders. What is concerning is that three of the infected had passed away which is not a good indicator for things to come. Dr. Tarazi is rightly worried that developments with the virus are very concerning given the limited space, the crowded environment and the limited medical facilities in the Gaza Strip. Amidst this heightened virus concern, the Israeli authorities closed the Karam Abu Salem commercial cross point which further limits the provision of fuel to the Electricity Generating Compound and results with cuts of electricity for up to 12 hours each day.



Until the recent spread of the virus in the Gaza Strip, our DSPR-NECCCRW colleagues continued with their planned activities. NECCCRW health staff provided health services and treatment for sick people with precautions and safe work practices including wearing of face masks, gloves and disposable gowns. The medical staff followed guidelines of infection prevention control and hygiene practices. NECC health centres also intensified awareness sessions and health education through lecturing, and audio-visual smart board on coronavirus prevention and protective measures, distributing brochures, hanging posters in this regard, and also raising the awareness through home visits. Psychosocial counseling and support in addition to health tips on how to deal preventively with the virus proved reassuring to many of women beneficiaries.

Likewise the Vocational Training activities continued with precautions and commitment to preventive measures and procedures keeping distances

between students (1.5 m at least), wearing gloves and masks and using sterilization and hygienic materials. Due to the complete lockdown on the Gaza Strip, DSPR-NECCCRW would stop all of its office, health and other communal activities until the lockdown starts easing out and there is authorization for resuming activities.

DSPR IN THE WESTBANK

According to the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial College London, the rate at which the disease is transmitted in the occupied West Bank has reached 1.58, meaning that every two infected individuals are likely to spread the virus to three more. The Palestinian Authority (PA), which exercises limited control over some areas of the occupied West Bank, has struggled to contain the spread of the virus. When the PA eased a lockdown following street protests in late May, there were less than 130 confirmed coronavirus infections. At present there are over 20,000 infected cases in Palestine with 141 deaths. This has necessitated the imposition of some control and containment measures. Health Ministry officials, nevertheless, fear that tracking of infection, in effort to stop the spread of the virus, is no longer possible as the virus has become 'social' meaning that with continuing group mixing, visiting and social events contrary to instructions, the virus spread can no longer be epidemiologically determined and contained. Continuous appeals are made to the population to follow health ministry guidelines on wearing masks, social distance and hygienic practices.



Unfortunately some continue to disregard these guidelines and the population suffers as a consequence. The non-adherence to social distancing guidelines is complicated by a lack of



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control over borders, especially with Israel, and the inability of the Palestinian government to monitor the movement of day laborers in and out of Israel which has an elevated virus rate. In late June, as it became clear that Hebron with 3,012 active cases and East Jerusalem with 2,067 active cases at present remain the epicenters of the outbreak. DSPR-ICC Jerusalem and West Bank continues with its planned activities for 2020. Our executive secretary colleague, Ramzi Zananiri, informs DSPR that reach out and visits to the northern areas of the West Bank where most of the activities are concentrated remain possible due to special permits allowing movement to these areas. Work from office continues including that of the Advocacy officer who participates actively in virtual meetings with colleagues in the different areas of DSPR as well as with the specialized meetings of ACT Forum and the Gender group. DSPR-ICC Jerusalem and West Bank emphasizes that the implementation work plan is underway despite obstacles and we are on track taking into consideration the Ministry Of Health directives.

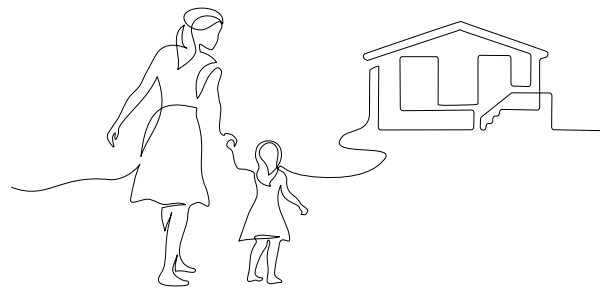
DSPR IN LEBANON

Three weeks after the explosion in Beirut, many residents continue to struggle with the consequences of the detonation. Lebanon faces the risk of losing control over its coronavirus outbreak with 14,937 cases at present and 146 deaths. The port explosion complicated matters and made it difficult to contain the spread of virus.



Destroyed grain silos in the port of Beirut, which handles the majority of Lebanese imports

Cases doubled in the two weeks following the blast, as infections spread in hospitals where victims were being treated, medics say and strict preventive measures were no longer possible due to the arrival of the injured victims of the Beirut port explosion. A two-week general lockdown, with a daily curfew from 6:00pm to 6:00am, was declared last Friday with the hope that the spike in infection numbers will flatten out. Clearing of the rubble, making repairs and giving out aid in the neighborhoods damaged by the explosion continue nevertheless. Not everyone has left their homes, many wanted to stay in their old accommodations and now have to cope with the consequences of the destruction. There is a lack of water, electricity and sanitary facilities in these houses.



Sylvia Haddad, DSPR-JCC Lebanon executive director has been active in joining the efforts to help those affected as a result of the blast. Together with the ACT Lebanon Forum she participated in the ACT Alliance Rapid Response Fund. She sees DSPR-JCC Lebanon participation in the relief and emergency efforts as part of Palestinian recognition of the hospitality that Lebanon has extended to Palestinian refugees since 1948. As part of the DSPR-JCC efforts was the participation of volunteers from the Dbayeh Palestinian Refugee camp in clearing rubble at the port and the vicinity and lending support to others who were active in the process.

Extending a helping hand to those elderly, to those whose homes have been destroyed and to families whose immediate need was to secure daily essentials was also part of the efforts by DSPR-JCC Lebanon. Sylvia has documented her feelings and reaction at the time of the port explosion in a strong personal testimony that was shared by partners, friends and those who care about Beirut and Lebanon at this hour of need.



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DSPR IN GALILEE

Hussam Elias, our executive director of DSPR-ICCI Galilee briefs DSPR on the status of the Covid19 in Israel as well as that of the activities and programs of Galilee area committee. Israel has been hard hit with the virus with an overall 110,403 cases since the start of the pandemic. At present there are 21,793 active cases with 884 deaths. Arab localities have been hard hit by the virus and attention has been focused on testing and preventive measures. Israel records an average daily infection rate of 1,500 cases which is similar to the infection rate in the most hit countries in the world. The mortality rate out of all infections remains relatively low but there is concern that the inability of the government to chart a clear course for dealing with the pandemic would eventually make the situation worse. Apparently living with the virus means giving priority to the economy and its functioning while the general population continues to conduct its daily life as if the virus is already behind us.

On the activities and programs of ICCI Galilee, the Acre women's program goes on even with some participants hesitating to come to the center due to fears of the virus spread. Mary, the coordinator for the women's program continues to be in contact with all participants and follows up virtually on the needs of each of the young women. The Youth Leadership program in Ma'aliyah continues with all activities outdoor. The program has 50 young people who are divided into two groups for the purpose of conducting activities and keeping up with preventive measures. The Ecumenical Youth program in Shafa'amr, Nazareth and Haifa saw a recent meeting in Shafa'amr of 25 youth, with Haifa at the Greek Catholic Church of 15 youth but unfortunately the youth in Nazareth could not come together. The Interfaith group has as its hub the Franciscan High School of Kafr Kana, the village where Jesus transformed water into wine for the lucky couple and participants at the nuptial event. At present we are in the process of recruiting teachers. We started with this program last year but unfortunately the virus stopped us. On Arab Jewish student groups, the

constraints imposed by the virus prevented the start of new bi-national groups. But we are hoping that as soon as the 'new normal' sets in, we will try to activate these groups. At Nof Hagalil, Upper Nazareth, Arab Jewish student groups have exchanged short videos in May and held some outdoor meetings together but with a limited number of participants. The university student loans are ongoing and the applications for the academic year 2020-2021 are being accepted now and the loan committee of ICC Galilee will meet to disburse loans starting January 2021.

