



# Newsletter Caritas MONA

Middle East and North Africa  
No. 11  
May - October 2020

## EDITORIAL by *Gabriel Hatti, President*



In August, news of explosions in Beirut shook the entire region.

In less than an hour, Caritas Lebanon teams were on the ground and the Regional Secretariat was flagging out the situation at the Confederation level.

None of us was prepared for such a shock. Weeks later, alongside our brothers and sisters in Lebanon, we too are still picking up our inner pieces after this tragic event.

In this restless region, no country is spared. Events keep happening with a heavier impact each time, leaving behind victims of tragedies and those of everyday life.

How then can we not ask ourselves about this humanity to whom the earth has been entrusted, so that it may keep it and live in it in peace?

How can we not question ourselves about our behaviors and thoughts which, each in its own way, go against the realization of such a peace project?

The rulers of this world play with human lives as if they were pawns.

There is, however, another order of magnitude, which becomes obvious when we are tempted to despair: that of the “little ones” and the “poor”, the outpouring of solidarity from the young and the eldest, which never runs out, always there and ready to help, to support and to comfort, with a smile, no matter the fatigue or lack of means.

This humanity cannot be defeated, it pushes us to ‘believe in hope against all hope’ that love is stronger than death.

## Beirut explosions

### Solidarity at the heart of the tragedy

On August 4, 2020, shortly after 6:00 p.m., explosions of unprecedented magnitude devastated the Lebanese capital in a matter of seconds, killing nearly 200 people and injuring 6,000. The port as well as the neighboring residential areas were literally pulverized. Further on, buildings, hospitals, churches and mosques, as well as buildings classified as historical heritage, were partially or totally destroyed. An estimated 300,000 people were left homeless.

But at the heart of the tragedy, an exceptional solidarity was immediately set up.



From the first hours, young people and health professionals from Caritas Lebanon (CL) were on the scene to help hospitals, overwhelmed by the influx of wounded, providing first aid. Volunteers from all over the country were then mobilized to help the residents. CL set up two large tents on site in order to distribute food and water, provide medicine, first aid, medical consultations and psychological support. By the beginning of October, CL had already restored 110 homes and 140 more were ongoing. Nearly 200 families had been helped with their rent and more than 50,000 hot meals had been distributed. Not to mention medical consultations, supply of medicines, etc.

For its part, Caritas MONA mobilized Caritas Internationalis (CI) and partners to support CL in this colossal emergency response it had to handle. The very next day, a teleconference to which several of our Caritas Sisters generously responded made it possible to provide a first aid, while waiting for the emergency appeal that CL launched to the whole confederation and where real bonds of fraternity within the network emerged.

In a gesture of great proximity, Pope Francis called for a day of prayer and fasting for Lebanon on September 4, 2020. That same day, the Pope mandated on site Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, to be alongside the Lebanese people.



## Visit of the CI Secretary General to Caritas Lebanon and Caritas MONA

CI Secretary General Aloysius John was in Lebanon from September 12 to 17, 2020, for a visit marked by support for Caritas Lebanon and solidarity with the Lebanese people. For almost a year, Lebanon has been suffering from the greatest economic crisis in its history, to which the August 4 explosions were added.

Several meetings were organized by the Regional Coordinator Karam Abi Yazbeck with key actors of civil society and local Churches, including a meeting with the Patriarch of the Maronite Church, Cardinal Bechara el Raï.

During a field visit, Aloysius John met teams of volunteers from Caritas Lebanon (CL) and listened to the testimony of families. Meetings were held with CL's Executive Board as well as with partners based in Beirut, to exchange information, support the structure and attempt to coordinate aid.

Aloysius John also expressed the commitment of Caritas Internationalis to Caritas MONA and Caritas Lebanon and called on the Confederation to spare no effort of action or advocacy that can help Lebanon to recover.



*Meeting with Caritas Lebanon Youth at Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine - Harissa @CL*

## Diversity at the service of the Common Good For a strengthened ecumenical and interreligious collaboration

Caritas MONA is launching a new project involving 10 Member Organizations (MOs) from the region: **Caritas Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Somalia, Syria and Tunisia.**

This project intends to emphasize ecumenical and interfaith collaboration in the mission of MOs and the promotion of peace and reconciliation.

Openness to diversity is an essential part of the mission of Caritas, where each MO seeks to mobilize communities to serve the Common Good (SO1.1). It is also one of the Region's essential wealth, that it would like to be able to share with the other Regions of the Confederation and with partners: diversity of cultures, Churches, religions which make our region an incomparable mosaic!

A pool of facilitators capable of taking charge of this dimension within the various activities and programs will be gradually established. In a first phase, remote training will be provided by experts in the field. It will be followed by field initiatives organized by each participant/MO accompanied by an expert.



## Covid-19: A look at Caritas Jerusalem and Caritas Iran

“Covid-19 continues to spread in the Gaza Strip where almost 2 million people have been living under blockade since 2007, without being able to leave the Territory to study, work or even receive medical care.

The lockdown has added further suffering to the population, the majority of whom live in small overcrowded houses with no more than 4 hours of electricity per day.

The health system in the Gaza Strip is on the verge of collapse: there are few opportunities for screening, a shortage of equipment and tests.

**Caritas Jerusalem’s** 5 Mobile Medical Teams (MMTs) continues to provide primary health care to non-Covid patients, such as physical examination, simple lab tests, medication, wound dressing and even ultrasound for pregnant women using a portable machine.

Emergency medical home care, provided in these extreme circumstances, brings much-needed relief and consolation to poor and sick people in lockdown.

Caritas MMTs have also extended their work to visit families in quarantine, assist them with basic counseling and medication and ensure that they have the necessary food and protection equipment. These large, multi-generational families can include children with disabilities, elderly people suffering from diabetes and other chronic diseases, pregnant women, children, and newborns.

The moral support given to these families is much appreciated and eases some of their fear, isolation and distress.”

*(The above photo @Caritas Jerusalem)*



**Caritas Iran** is also working alongside the Iranian population affected by the growing number of COVID-19 cases, amid an embargo. In recent months, numerous donations of food and equipment have been made in several provinces of the country, of which some are classified as "red zones" because of the high incidence of the virus.

The Caritas Iran team distributed 520 food baskets and 520 hygiene packs to needy populations in 9 villages of the Sistan and Baluchestan province, also affected by floods.

In the Kermanshah province, 200 hygiene packs in Sarpol-e-Zahab, were distributed to vulnerable families affected by the earthquake. Medical and hygiene items as well as disinfectants were donated to a hospital providing treatment for patients infected by COVID-19, coming also from surrounding villages. 200 hygiene packs and 200 food baskets were as well distributed to surrounding deprived villages around Sarpol-e-Zahab.

To reduce the risk of the spread of Coronavirus among vulnerable communities, medical and hygiene items were also donated to 3 Elderly Homes related to the Catholic Church, two of which are located in Tehran and one in Urmieh.

In the City of Bam, 120 hygiene packs were distributed to the Spinal Cord Injured persons and needy families with handicapped or elderly members. Hygiene items as well as disinfectants were donated to a Center for Handicapped Children, some of whom were infected by Coronavirus.



photo@  
Caritas  
Iran

## Human rights and unilateral economic sanctions

Caritas MONA continues its advocacy efforts to alert world opinion and stakeholders to the disastrous effects of unilateral coercive measures and economic sanctions imposed by foreign world powers on countries in the region.

The very term "sanction" might make these measures look like legitimate - since only the guilty are punished. But many of them raise serious legal and moral issues.

Beyond the free will of world powers to suspend their economic or trade relations with the countries of their choice, these sanctions set up real embargoes. Entire populations then serve as means of pressure in the political game. People fall by millions below the poverty line, deprived of funds, goods, medical equipment and everything that would have enabled them to fight effectively against the pandemic and for their survival.

On the World Humanitarian Day, Caritas Europa and Caritas MONA issued a joint statement emphasizing the "hidden human cost" of these measures, a cost borne by the weakest and most vulnerable.

Caritas MONA and Caritas Internationalis are also leading a joint advocacy effort within the Confederation and with international bodies because the situation in the countries of the region is becoming really alarming.

For example, the sanctions on Lebanon are passed over in silence even though they are one of the main causes that precipitated the collapse of the country, pushing half of the population below the poverty line in a few months.

*"Nowadays, what do certain words like democracy, freedom, justice or unity really mean? They have been bent and shaped to serve as tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action." (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti,14)*

*(Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 14)*

### ROACO (Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches)

The annual ROACO meeting was held online on June 23, 2020 with the participation of Caritas MONA.

The discussions mainly focused on the initiatives of the different Agencies during the pandemic and on the financing of the various projects in the Region.

The participants also discussed the possibility of helping the Lebanese school sector severely affected by the socio-economic crisis.

A second extraordinary meeting was held on September 3, 2020. This time, it focused on Lebanon because of the Beirut explosions and the economic collapse of the country.

### Regional Commission

The MONA Regional Commission meeting took place by videoconference on May 05, 2020.

It had the following agenda: the implementation of previous decisions, the process of recognition of the Regional Secretariat and other financial questions.

The President (Mr. Hatti) presented the global situation in the region, especially the impact of the pandemic (COVID-19) on the countries and on the MOs already suffering from socio-economic, political and natural crisis, particularly because of the sanctions imposed on them. Msgr. Bertin then presented the situation in the Horn of Africa, Msgr. Arbache spoke about the situation in the Middle East and Ms. Rapacioli gave an overview of the situation in North Africa.

Secondly, the Regional Coordinator (Mr. Abi Yazbeck) presented the progress made in the SR recognition process. Efforts will be continued in this direction.

The Commission also renewed its decision to encourage MOs that have not yet started to implement the CI MS (Caritas Internationalis Management Standards) to do so, and to support them in this process.



(Above, family in Yemen @PAH)

(Below, Beekeeping project in Homs @Caritas Syria)



## Caritas Syria

### Young Entrepreneur tells his success story

Mouhammad Ghanem Rashed Rajoub, a 25-year-old Agricultural Engineer from Homs was one of the beneficiaries of the Livelihood Project for small enterprises. With the help of Caritas Syria, he was able to implement a beekeeping project. This is how he recounts his experience:

*“I learned through social media and road ads about Caritas Syria helping young people to start small projects. I applied, hoping to succeed.”*

## Caritas in Yemen

Since May 2020, **Caritas Poland has been registered in the Republic of Yemen**. This is the first presence of Caritas in the country.

Yemen has been torn apart for several years by a devastating civil war. Above all, it is experiencing the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world, aggravated by international economic sanctions.

Hunger affects more than two-thirds of the population and more than 14 million adults and children need immediate assistance to stay alive. Access to clean drinking water is often made impossible and the simultaneous spread of several diseases, such as cholera, chikungunya, dengue and malaria, further weaken the population.

Only half of the health centers are functional but they lack equipment, staff and everything that would have made it possible to fight the COVID-19 epidemic.

According to the WHO, between 55% and 86% of the population could be infected with the virus, resulting in 42,000 to 60,000 deaths, especially as Yemenis suffer from severe immune deficiencies due to malnutrition.

Caritas Poland will act mainly in the health field, through projects supporting the local health sector, purchase of medical equipment, vaccinations for children, training of medical personnel, awareness raising and other activities enabling to meet the needs created by the pandemic.

*“Thankfully, I was accepted and invited to attend an Entrepreneurship Course.”*

*“I then started my project with a financial aid from Caritas Syria, without which I would not have been able to provide the materials needed to build and operate the hives, which started the production wheel.”*

Mouhammad thanks Caritas Syria particularly for having always *“taken the lead in supporting entrepreneurial projects that target the youth.”* thus giving them a reason to hope and the means to look serenely into the future.

## Shared experience, from Caritas Tunisia

This summer and in order to minimize the impact of lockdown on women and children in the working-class neighborhoods of Tunis and Sfax and to strengthen solidarity between Tunisian families and migrants, Caritas Tunisia had the idea to organize cultural and fun days, in partnership with the Tunisian Heritage Association.

The first day brought together women and children from Melassine to discover the forest of El Rimel, which is situated along the beach, and to explore its botanical diversity. The participants shared lunch with the young facilitators of Caritas and it was an occasion for a joyful exchange, animated by dances, songs and “ululations”! Children were happy with swimming and playing beach games and mothers were able to take advantage of this moment of escape to dream of a better future. Even the “Corona” seemed so far away ...



In August, it was the turn of young migrant workers and young Tunisian civil society activists to go out together: an opportunity to overcome the fear of the other and to consolidate the bonds of brotherhood. This time, the lunch on the beach was around a good rice with fish, prepared by the young migrants, in the Ivorian way.



To consolidate this experience of “shared path”, Caritas Tunisia ran a one-month summer school for children from migrant families and their Tunisian neighbors, in the heart of the popular district of Bahr Lazreg. In this district of the suburbs of Tunis, Tunisian and Ivorian workers rub work side by side in construction sites.

Young Tunisian and sub-Saharan facilitators also led together fun and educational workshops, supervised by the Caritas Tunisia team, in collaboration with members of other Tunisian associations. These activities took place in a large structure called “the B7 L9 art station”. This structure belongs to the Kamel Lazaar foundation, which has dedicated it to meeting

artists from all over the world in the heart of this growing popular district.

These initiatives were a privileged opportunity for meeting and showing creativity between people who do not usually talk to each other, or who cross paths while ignoring each other. Working with children in particular has shown us that all children, whatever their origins, are spontaneously open to others, and that the rejection of the other because of their difference comes to them only by proxy from the adult history. The future of our common humanity is therefore entrusted to our responsibility as adults and guides of these young people.

(photos @CaritasTunisia)

## ***News from the Covid-19 Response Fund***

At the start of the pandemic, CI and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DPIHD) had created an intervention fund to support projects submitted by Catholic organizations, help contain the spread of the pandemic and mitigate its impact on the populations who need most assistance.

Accompanied by Caritas MONA, 5 Member Organizations of the Region were able to benefit from this assistance:

Caritas Algeria

Caritas Iran

Caritas Iraq

Caritas Jerusalem

Caritas Lebanon



P.O.Box: 60-317 Zalka - Lebanon

☎ +961 1 893 599

✉ [caritas@caritasmona.org](mailto:caritas@caritasmona.org)

📘 Caritas MONA

🐦 @Caritas\_Mona