



Photo Credit: Caritas Syria

Editorial

By Mr. Gabriel Hatti, President of Caritas MONA

Time flies. We are already in May of this year in which we still hope to see the end of the pandemic that has changed everyone's life.

In view of the number of sick and dead, it would be indecent to speak of the "positive effects" of such a tragedy, but we cannot deny the awareness that it has provoked, forcing us to open our eyes to the reality of entire countries or categories of people that we had become accustomed to ignoring. Above all, it reminded us how "everything is connected", and how interdependent we all are. A salutary reminder, which should finally open us up to each other in order to move forward together, for the good of all.

It is up to us to seize the opportunity and transform this "awareness" into a real "examination of conscience" which can lead to courageous decisions and concrete measures: fair distribution of vaccines,

debt relief, lifting of sanctions, reduction of armaments, restructuring of the economy, and so many other subjects on which our collective responsibility is engaged.

In our region, the year 2021 reminds us that the war in Syria is already 10 years old. A war that continues to claim innocent victims, and where all the dysfunctions of our world are manifested.

In March, Iraq received the visit of Pope Francis, a long-awaited visit followed by the whole world, which was like a breath of life in a breathless country! On the plane back to Rome, the Holy Father announced that he would soon be visiting Lebanon, news that many had hoped for but did not dare to believe.

In the following bulletin, you will find a small selection of news from Caritas in our Region.

Work together, in the diversity of cultures, churches and religions



Are our societies as uniform as we think they are? Do we really know the diversity, visible or invisible, of our countries? What do we know about their history and current issues? How does the Caritas mission fit into such diversity? What wealth remains untapped, what difficulties must be overcome? How can we increase collaboration between people who come from different churches and from different religions? How to analyze, transmit and train on these themes?

Since January, the 22 participants in the **Regional Capacity Strengthening Project (CSP)**, organized by the Regional Secretariat, have been diving into all these subjects. Every Tuesday, with remarkable

diligence and seriousness, they met online for a two-hour session with multidisciplinary trainers. On occasion, they braved the hazards of connection and translation, which are inevitable in distance learning!

Women and men, Christians and Muslims, of different nationalities and countries, the group was in itself a telling image of the constitutive diversity of our Member Organizations and of our Region.

The first stage of the project is now completed but the action continues! By May, participants will have planned a local initiative, activity or training, which they will implement this summer.

A case to follow !



Safeguarding people: a priority

Safeguarding is one of the key issues for the year 2021 throughout the Caritas Confederation, especially since the creation of what is today known as "the 5th Management Standard (MS)", a mandatory cross-cutting standard which has been added to the 4 pre-existing standards on which all Caritas Member Organizations (MOs) are currently conducting their self-assessment work.

Caritas MONA has made this subject one of its priorities. In collaboration with *Caritas Internationalis* and other partners, training sessions have been organized since February, to reach all those concerned: directors,

institutional development or safeguarding managers, coordinators, etc.

General training and others more technical were carried out successively.

The Regional Secretariat also offers to MOs who express the wish, a more personalized accompaniment in implementing the CI MS.

The translation into Arabic and the standardization of tools and guidelines is also ongoing and is of great importance for the effective implementation of the process.

Judging by the level of involvement of all, the result seems promising!

A human-centered approach of migration

A webinar from Caritas Europa, Caritas Africa and Caritas MONA

Around 80% of the world's migrants and refugees are hosted by developing countries and only 20% by developed countries. Yet many developed countries continue to view migration as a threat when the reality of the situation is far from confirming such a fear.

Caritas believes that the political leaders of these countries have a choice: to continue restrictive, harmful and, above all, counterproductive policies, or to recognize the real positive impact of human mobility on economies and societies and to change their approach.

Thus, the secretariats of three major regions of the Confederation, Caritas Europa, Caritas Africa and Caritas MONA, jointly organized, on the 24th of March 2021, a webinar aimed at reflecting on the

meaning and possibility of a human-centered approach to migration.

This webinar was an opportunity to listen to analysis and testimonies on the reality of the ground, and to identify the changes to be made for an economy which encourages integral human development and which can recognize the contribution of migrants to the hosting societies.

From the MONA region, 4 speakers contributed to the reflection: Mr. Karam Abi Yazbeck, Regional Coordinator of Caritas MONA, Mr. Elie Abouaoun, Director of MENA programs in the United States Institute for Peace (*USIP*), Sister Speciosa Mugakatara, Director of Caritas Tunisia, and Ms. Mouna Guidiri, Communication Officer at Caritas in Morocco.

| 2011- 2021 Ten years of war in Syria



Photo Credit: Caritas Syria

Long ten years, and the war is still going on.

Caritas has been present in Syria for **50 years**. With the onset of the war in 2011, its action has been multiplied and the Organization had to grow at the rate of the increasing requests, and enter into unforeseen areas of assistance, knowing that the magnitude of the needs was far beyond its grasp.

With **250 employees and 78 volunteers**, Caritas is now present in most of Syria's regions; knowing that Caritas Syria members, staff and volunteers are also living in the same situation as the people they have committed to serve.

Caritas Syria helps nearly **200,000 beneficiaries** each year, through multiple and varied projects: distribution of food baskets and hygiene kits, educational programs (*paying school fees, distributing stationery materials*

to students), rehabilitation of schools and houses, psychological support for children and creation of suitable spaces, job training, assistance for young entrepreneurs, etc.

Unfortunately, the work of Caritas, like that of other humanitarian associations, is still heavily hampered by foreign economic "sanctions" that global human rights associations have repeatedly denounced.

Despite all the obstacles, Caritas Syria has been able to transform the lives of thousands of people in all regions of the country since the beginning of the war: **more than 1 million people have been able to return to their "normal" life thanks to assistance projects, more than 140 houses have been rehabilitated and 3 schools restored**, not to mention all the other projects which continue on a daily basis and which often give back, beyond material aid, humanity and a reason for living.

10 years in 10 figures

— **13 million** Syrians had to flee their homes. This is more than 60 % of the country's estimated population. Almost 1 in 4 of the world's refugees are Syrian, the rest are internally displaced. It is the largest displaced population in the world.

— **400,000** people lost their lives in this war.

— **5 million** children were born in Syria since the beginning of the war. They have never known peace.

— **1 in 3** children, or nearly 2.5 million children in Syria are out of school and nearly 1.6 million are at risk of dropping out. A third of the country's schools have been damaged or destroyed, are sheltering displaced families or they are being used for military purposes. Many children are also taken out of school to work.

— **90%** of children in Syria need humanitarian aid, a 20% increase in the past year alone.

— **13 years.** The life expectancy of a child in Syria has been reduced by 13 years since the start of the conflicts.

(Source: UNRIC, UNICEF, OCHA)

— **1.7 trillion.** The cumulative economic cost of the war is estimated at more than USD 1.2 trillion, a figure equivalent to the budget of the European Union over 10 years, and that of the negative impacts on health and education at USD 1.7 trillion.

— **1.6%.** The cumulative humanitarian aid in Syria over 10 years is estimated at USD 19.4 million, or less than 1.6% of the cost of the war.

(Source: World Vision)

— **100 times.** It is the devaluation of the Syrian pound since the start of the crisis. The price of bread has increased 60 times. The price of an egg has increased from 3 Syrian pounds to 300 Syrian pounds.

— **70%** of healthcare workers have left the country and 50% of the health infrastructure have been destroyed.

Caritas in Alexandria: for the abandonment of “female genital mutilation” in Egypt



Photo Credit: Caritas Egypt

The genital mutilation of young girls and women is still a common practice in many countries. Rooted in traditions, it is a sensitive subject that NGOs most often prefer to avoid.

It is therefore with courage that the Alexandria office of Caritas Egypt has launched a project aimed at the abolition of female genital mutilation (FGM).

This year, in partnership with the Directorate of Religious Endowments (*Waqf*) of Alexandria, Caritas organized a training workshop titled "Together to change a harmful social habit ... No to FGM". Were present at this workshop Sheikh Abdel Rahman Nasr Nassar, Deputy Director of the Waqf Directorate and Sheikh Wissam Kassib, General Director of Monitoring

and responsible for online Daawa as well as many imams and sheikhs from the four regions where the project is implemented.

In his speech on behalf of the Directorate, Sheikh Nassar emphasized the will of Islam to correct concepts and practices, to distinguish between customs and religious precepts, and to better place religious texts in their context.

During the workshop, the subject was approached from different angles: religious, health, cultural and social. Emphasis was placed on the responsibility of all in raising awareness that FGM is not a religious precept but a harmful custom that must be discouraged and abandoned, in the very name of a better understanding of religion.

Among its permanent projects, the Alexandria Office of Caritas Egypt works in many sectors, including support for families and children in difficulty, assistance to the elderly and their integration into society, training for youth, aid to migrants, micro-credits, etc.



Photo Credit: Caritas Egypt

News from Caritas in Morocco The "SELA" and "Tadamoun" Programs



Photo Credit: Caritas in Morocco



Photo Credit: Caritas in Morocco

While the number of Covid19 cases has stabilized in Morocco and the vaccination campaign is progressing well, restrictive measures are still imposed in the country to prevent a resurgence of cases. A few days before the start of Ramadan, a curfew was put in place at 8 p.m. to avoid gatherings in houses, streets or mosques.

Regarding Caritas in Morocco, the reception centers and teams are closely following the evolution of measures and constantly adapt the mechanisms and modalities of action, pushing back the limits of routine in order to remain as close as possible to migrants who are strongly affected by the restrictions.

As part of the changes caused by the pandemic, many efforts have been made to successfully complete the SELA project, which will end at the end of March. SELA – meaning *link* in Arabic – is one of the main programs that have structured the work of Caritas with migrants in Morocco.

Launched in April 2019, its central challenge was the establishment of a territorial network allowing better coordination of actors in the different areas of Morocco, in order to offer better assistance to the most vulnerable migrants. Indeed, migratory

movements have expanded geographically in recent years, covering a larger portion of the Moroccan territory.

SELA's lines of intervention ranged from emergency assistance to capacity building, including the protection of specific profiles such as minors, sick and isolated people, single mothers, etc. The program was based on the coordination and experience sharing of 7 actors - diocesan centers and parishes - in Rabat, Tangier, Laayoune, Dakhla, Fez and Meknes.

In 2020, 12,425 people were received, 60% of them for the first time and 74% in border areas. Almost 8,000 beneficiaries also received humanitarian aid, 10% of which was in the form of housing assistance.

After "SELA", it is the "Tadamoun" – solidarity – program which takes over for a transitional year preparing for the implementation of a new multi-year program from 2022.

The "Tadamoun" program will focus on three main areas: access of vulnerable migrants to assistance and support services, restructuring of the protection system for children on the move and strengthening the skills of those working in the field from the Catholic Church in Morocco.

A Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Abraham

The Pope's visit to Iraq

From March 5 to 8, the whole world had its eyes on Iraq, which for the first time in its history received a visit from a Pope from Rome.

The Holy Father was welcomed by all Iraqis, in the diversity of their beliefs and their affiliations. The emotion was tangible, as if we were suddenly witnessing the life force that a people can carry despite hardship: before our eyes, we saw an entire people come back to life, in color, in songs, in prayers! A visit full of symbols, as all the media and more than 350 satellite channels which broadcast the event live have noted. Indeed, the word "symbol" - from the Greek *sum-bolon* - refers to what brings together, to what unites, as were the gestures and words exchanged during this visit.

The most striking was the joy of the young and old alike. A true and contagious joy, even through the screens.

Caritas Iraq took part in this visit as well, like all Iraqis. Here is what they had to say about it:

"The visit united the Iraqi people and made it possible to believe that hope for a better Iraq is not lost. Christians again feel that they are not alone and that they belong to a bigger family. Through interaction with other components of Iraqi society, Christians were reminded of the importance of their presence in their country. They felt encouraged to return to areas like Mosul, which they were forced



Photo Credit: Vatican News

to leave because of the terrorism of ISIS, and to hold onto their land, heritage and history which are worth all the wealth and treasures of the world. The visit revived faith, love and hope, for all Iraqis, and for Christians in particular".

"The most important is that we find ourselves discussing the Pope's visit and wondering how to benefit from it for the future. We see it as a sign for us Iraqis to never give up and believe that Iraq can once again become the cradle of civilizations, religions and diversity.

The Pope has left us with a very strong encouragement to be instruments of peace, of love, of God's mercy, and to be patient and courageous actors of a new social system.

The visit of the Holy Father taught us to get out of the sectarian mentality, to accept each other with love and to respect the richness of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity.

As members of Caritas, we must continue to "build people up", to focus on social cohesion and acceptance of diversity".

"Brothers and sisters of different religions, here we find ourselves at home, and from here, together, we wish to commit ourselves to fulfilling God's dream that the human family may become hospitable and welcoming to all his children; that looking up to the same heaven, it will journey in peace on the same earth".

Pope Francis during the interreligious meeting of Ur, on the 6th of March 2021.

News



On the 3rd of March 2021, Most Rev. Yacoub Ephrem Semaan, Syro-Catholic Exarch of Jerusalem was elected President of Caritas Jerusalem. His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa was elected Vice-President.

The position of Executive Director at Caritas Lebanon replaced that of Director General. In November 2020, Mr. Gilbert Zouein has been appointed Executive Director of Caritas Lebanon.



The Holy Father Pope Francis has appointed Mr. Gabriel Hatti, President of Caritas MONA, Member of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (*DPIHD*), for a period of five years.

Our prayers join them in their new missions!

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