

THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Light-of-Hope

MECC bulletin for the Middle East and Lebanon ordeal and rescue efforts

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مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

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Bread of Life and the Light of Hope

In my reading on the Middle East Council of Churches websites regarding the events of the "Day of Charity and Solidarity" with the displaced people of the South, which took place in Bkerke on Sunday, April 19, the number of participants caught my attention: "The number of participants exceeded two thousand five hundred people."

Immediately, my mind recalled the echo of a similar reference in the account of the multiplication of the loaves in the Gospel of John: "Now the men numbered about five thousand" (John 6:10). It is as if the scene is renewing itself across time: crowds coming from a wounded land, from sixty-three suffering villages, to gather around a single table, just as the crowds gathered in the wilderness around the Lord Jesus.

There, in the wilderness, the Lord had compassion on the crowds, for He saw their hunger before they expressed it and felt their need before they spoke of it. Although He knew what He was about to do, He wanted to involve His disciples in the mystery of giving, so He asked Philip: "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5). As for human calculation, it remained a prisoner of quantity and measurement.

But the Lord Jesus, lifting His eyes to heaven, gave thanks, blessed, and broke [the bread]; He satisfied the many from the few, making five loaves an inexhaustible fountain of abundance, until much was left over.

The miracle of the Lord, especially in the Gospel of John, is not merely a passing event but a sign leading to a deeper mystery. However, the crowds, stopping at the perishable bread, wanted to make Him king to guarantee for themselves temporal satisfaction. As for Him, He withdrew from them, then called to them when they met Him again: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life" (John 6:27).

Jesus is the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35).



Here, we also encounter the Sunday Gospel read during the Mass, which His Beatitude Patriarch Al-Rahi focused on in his sermon: the account of the two disciples of Emmaus, who were returning to their village overwhelmed by sadness and despair. Their eyes were opened when "He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them" (Luke 24:30).

The two disciples experienced a great disappointment, as if hope had been extinguished at the sight of the Cross. But in this state, where a person feels as though everything has ended, Jesus appears, and with His presence, a new path begins. The presence of the Lord is a force that supports and strengthens hope, as the Patriarch reminded us.

The mission of the Church today is the continuation of Jesus' presence. This is what was manifested in the "Day of Charity and Solidarity," and is manifested in the works and initiatives carried out by the Council of Churches and various institutions.

Let us walk together on this path—the path of love and giving. Let us make the breaking of bread among us, and upon the table of the Eucharist, a mystery of renewed encounter, where the presence of the Lord walking with us is rediscovered, and our eyes are opened to the light of hope.

Rev. Fr. Antoine Al-Ahmar
"Arabic version on next page"

خبز الحياة ونور الرجاء

في قراءتي على مواقع مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط لوقائع «يوم المحبة والتضامن» مع أبناء الجنوب النازحين، الذي جرى في بكركي يوم الأحد 19 نيسان، لفت انتباهي ذكر عدد المشاركين في هذا الحدث: «وقد تجاوز عدد المشاركين ألفين وخمسمئة شخص».

فاستعاد فكري، على الفور، صدى إشارة مماثلة في رواية تكثير الخبز في إنجيل يوحنا: «وكان عدد الرجال نحو خمسة آلاف» (يو 6: 10). كأنّ المشهد يتجدد عبر الزمن: جموع تأتي من أرضٍ مجروحة، من ثلاث وستين بلدة تتألم، لتلتئم حول مائدة واحدة، كما التأمّت الجموع في البرية حول الربّ يسوع.

هناك، في البرية، تحنّ الربّ على الجموع، إذ رأى جوعهم قبل أن يعبروا عنه، ولا مسر حاجتهم قبل أن ينطقوا بها. ومع أنّه كان يعلم ما سوف يصنع، أراد أن يُشرك تلاميذه في سرّ العطاء، فسأل فيلبس: «من أين نشتري خبزاً لنُطعمهم؟» (يو 6: 5). أمّا الحساب البشري، فبقي أسير الكمّ والقياس.

لكنّ الربّ يسوع، إذ رفع عينيه إلى السماء، شكر وبارك وكسر، فأشبع الكثيرين من القليل، وجعل من خمسة أرغفة ينبوع فيض لا ينضب، حتى فضّل عنهم الكثير.

وأعجوبة الربّ، ولا سيّما في إنجيل يوحنا، ليست مجرد حدثٍ عابر، بل آيةٌ تقود إلى سرّ أعمق. غير أنّ الجموع، إذ توقّفت عند الخبز الفاني، أرادت أن تجعله ملكاً، ليضمنوا لأنفسهم شعباً زمنيّاً. أمّا هو، فأنصرف عنهم، ثم دعاهم، عندما التقوا به ثانية: «لا تعملوا للقوت الفاني، بل اعملوا للقوت الباقي للحياة الأبدية» (يو 6: 27).

يسوع هو «خبز الحياة» (يو 6: 35).



هنا نلتقي أيضاً مع إنجيل الأحد الذي تُلي في القُداس، وتوقّف عنده غبطة البطريرك الراعي في عظته: رواية تلميذَي عمّاس، اللذين كانا عائدَين إلى قريتهما وقد غمرهما الحزن واليأس. فانفتحت أعينهما عندما «أخذ يسوع الخبز وبارك، وكسر، وأعطاهما» (لو 24: 30).

اختبر التلميذان خيبةً كبيرة، وكان الرجاء قد انطفأ عند مشهد الصليب. لكن في هذه الحالة، التي يعيشها الإنسان وكأنّ كلّ شيء قد انتهى، يحضر يسوع، وبحضوره تبدأ طريق جديدة. حضور الربّ هو قوّة تسند وتثبت في الرجاء، كما ذكّر البطريرك.

رسالة الكنيسة اليوم هي استمرار حضور يسوع. هذا ما تجلّى في «يوم المحبّة والتضامن»، ويتجلّى في الأعمال والمبادرات التي يقوم بها مجلس الكنائس ومختلف المؤسسات.

فلنسرّ معاً في هذا الدرب، درب المحبّة والعطاء، ولنجعل من كسر الخبز بيننا، وعلى مائدة الافخارستيا، سرّ لقاءٍ متجدّد، يُعاد فيه اكتشاف حضور الربّ السائر معنا، وتفتح فيه أعيننا على نور الرجاء.

الأب أنطوان الأحمر



MECC Work Updates

MECC is mobilizing emergency assistance across Lebanon to support displaced families and vulnerable communities with lifesaving aid and essential services:

I- Winter Blankets – ELCH

Activity Description

Winter blankets were distributed to displaced families across multiple locations, both inside and outside collective shelters. This intervention was supported by ELCH, in response to the ongoing needs of households affected by displacement.



A total of 700 beneficiaries were reached through this activity. The distribution aimed to provide immediate relief and support families facing difficult living conditions, particularly those residing in shelters or in inadequate housing arrangements.

The blankets were well received by beneficiaries, who highlighted their importance in improving comfort and helping them cope with changing weather conditions. The distribution process was carried out across different sites to ensure wider coverage and accessibility for displaced households.

Distribution

- 140 Blankets distributed at the Saint Anne Collective shelter in Rabwe
- 160 Blankets distributed by MECC at The Way Sin el Fil for IDPs
- 400 Blankets distributed in 3 collective shelters in Deir el Amar in coordination with the church and the municipality



Feedback

Beneficiary feedback was very positive, particularly in elevated areas where temperatures remain low. Many highlighted that the blankets were still needed despite the season, as cold weather conditions persist in these locations, and the assistance helped improve their comfort.

The Mayor of Deir El Qamar expressed his sincere appreciation for the support, noting that the distribution was both timely and much needed. He emphasized that the municipality is hosting a significant number of displaced individuals and continues to face urgent humanitarian needs, particularly given the ongoing cold weather condition





II- Diesel Distribution – ELCH & ELCA

Activity Description



Diesel was distributed to collective shelters and municipalities in the South and Beirut and Mount Lebanon (BML), supporting displaced populations and responding to urgent needs related to electricity and basic service provision. This intervention was supported by ELCH and ELCA and aimed to help maintain essential operations in sites hosting displaced families.

The provision of diesel contributed to powering generators used for lighting, water pumping, and other critical services, supporting adequate living conditions within shelters and easing pressure on municipalities managing high numbers of displaced individuals

Distribution

- Deir el Amar collective shelter benefiting 250 individuals
- Flora Guesthouse collective shelter benefiting 1100 individuals
- Ain Dara collective shelter benefiting 150 individuals
- Tyr DRR & collective shelter benefiting 3640 individuals
- Ain Ebel Municipality benefiting 1540 individuals
- Rmeich Municipality benefiting 6000 individuals
- Kawkaba Municipality benefiting 280 individuals



Feedback

Beneficiary feedback was very positive, as the provision of diesel addressed a critical need within shelters and municipalities supporting displaced populations. The fuel support played a key role in maintaining essential services, particularly electricity and water supply, which are vital for daily living in collective shelters.

Archimandrite Sassin in Al Rabwe Collective Shelter expressed his satisfaction and appreciation for the Council's engagement, particularly highlighting the importance of the needs assessment conducted by the MECC team prior to the assistance. He also welcomed the provision of fuel support, which was urgently needed to ensure the continuity of essential services within the shelter during this critical period.





III- Water Bottles – ELCH

Activity Description



Diesel was distributed to collective shelters and municipalities in the South and Beirut and Mount Lebanon (BML), supporting displaced populations and responding to urgent needs related to electricity and basic service provision. This intervention was supported by ELCH and ELCA and aimed to help maintain essential operations in sites hosting displaced families.

A total of 1,400 beneficiaries were reached through this activity, with each beneficiary receiving one pack of water bottles (six 2-liter bottles). The distribution aimed to provide immediate relief and support families facing difficult living conditions, particularly those residing in shelters.

The water bottles were well received by beneficiaries, as they helped address immediate daily needs and improve access to safe drinking water.

Distribution

- 450 Packs of bottled water for 450 beneficiaries at Saint Anne collective shelter in Rabwe
- 950 Packs of bottled water for 950 beneficiaries at Flora Guesthouse collective shelter in Karantina



Feedback

Beneficiary feedback was very positive, as all distributions took place within collective shelters where access to clean water remains limited. Many highlighted the importance of receiving potable water, noting that it is essential for their daily use and overall well-being in crowded living conditions.

The support was considered timely and necessary, as it helped ease some of the immediate challenges related to securing safe drinking water





IV- Protection Activity in Shelter – NCA

Activity Description

GBV awareness sessions were conducted at the collective shelter in Achrafieh, at the Saint Joseph Church, targeting IDP migrant women and girls, alongside a recreational activity for their children. This intervention was supported by NCA, in response to the protection needs of displaced populations.

A total of 45 individuals were reached through one session. The activity aimed to raise awareness on gender-based violence, promote safe practices, and provide participants with information on available support services. In parallel, recreational activities for children created a safe and supportive environment, allowing women and girls to engage more comfortably in the session.

The session was well received, with participants actively engaging in discussions and expressing appreciation for the safe space created, particularly given the sensitivities around such topics. The inclusion of recreational activities for children was also valued, as it supported participation and created a more comfortable environment for attendees.





Feedback

Beneficiary feedback was very positive, with women and girls expressing appreciation for the safe space created during the session. Participants highlighted the importance of discussing sensitive topics such as gender-based violence in a supportive and respectful environment.

The recreational activity for children was also well received, as it allowed participants to engage more comfortably in the session while ensuring their children were in a safe and engaging space.





Audio Visual Media from Reality









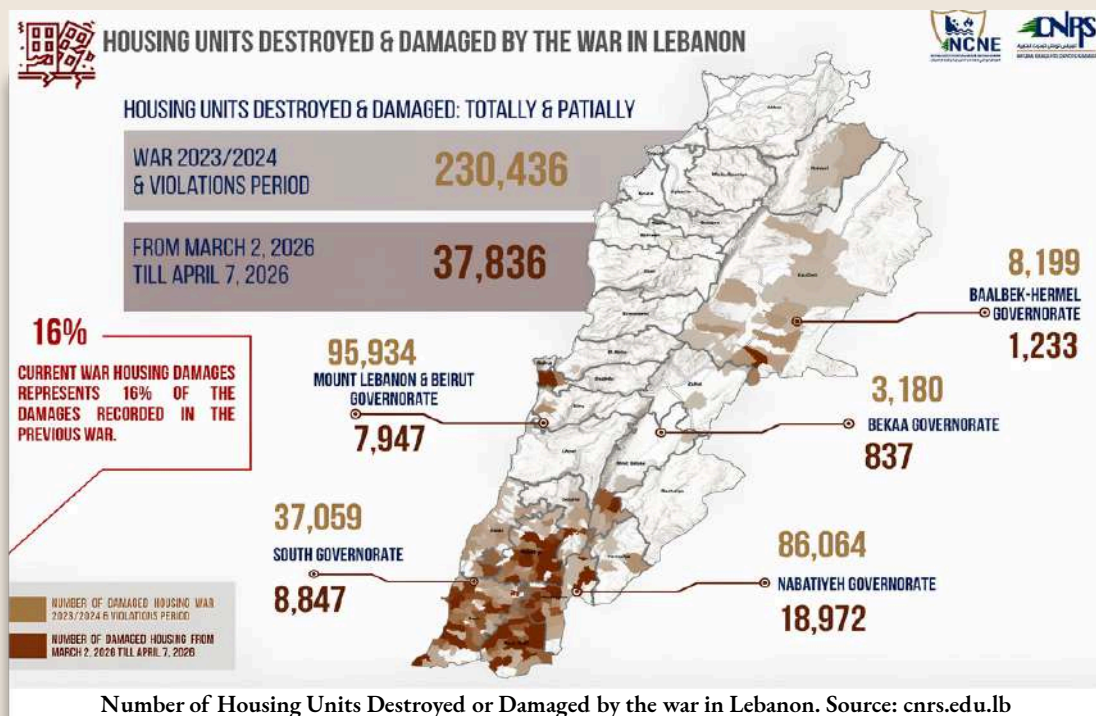
Casualties, Displacements and Level of Devastation in the ME:

Lebanon

Deaths: Deaths: + 2454 (among them are 51 healthcare workers)
Injuries: + 7658.

Level of Devastation: ~40,000 housing units damaged in just 35 days, this accounts for approximately 16% of the total damage recorded during the previous phases of the war. Most affected areas: Southern Beirut Suburbs — highest concentration of damage, Nabatieh, Bint Jbeil, Sour (Tyre).

IDPs: 118,624 scattered in 635 shelters. Ministry of Health designated 77 hospitals which treat IDPs free of charge.





Key Developments:

- Occupier strikes have hit a hotel in a Beirut suburb (Comfort Hotel on the border of Hazmieh) and a residential complex in eastern Lebanon, killing at least 11 people (March 4)
- Israel has launched massive strikes against the southern suburbs of Beirut just hours after its military ordered the entire population of the area – more than 500,000 people – to evacuate immediately (March 5)
- Lebanese health ministry said an Israeli air strike hit Beirut's city center, targeting a hotel room, killing four people and wounding 10 others. (March 8)
- A Maronite parish priest, Father Pierre Al-Rahi, was killed and at least five people were injured this afternoon by a strike on the Christian-majority village of Qlayaa in southern Lebanon. Fr Pierre al-Rahi, had stayed in the village, defying an Occupier order to leave, in order to protect his parishioners. (March 9)
- An airstrike killed 8 people and injured 31 people in the coastal area of AL ramla al-Bayda in central Beirut. (March 11)
- Occupiers targeted the Qaqaiyat al-Jisr area of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon killing one Lebanese soldier and injuring 5 others. (March 17)
- An airstrike on an apartment in "Zuqaq al-Blat" in Beirut resulted in two deaths and 14 injuries, according to initial reports. (March 18)



- The Occupier attacked a building in Bashoura, a neighbourhood in the heart of Beirut. The structure was completely demolished. (March 18)
- The warplanes carried out three raids on the Al-Qasimiya coastal bridge in the Burj Rahal area, causing extensive damage to the bridge, rendering it completely out of service and preventing cars from crossing it. (March 22)
- Occupier warplanes destroyed the Qaqaiya Bridge on the Litani River, which connects the cities of Sidon and Tyre. (March 23)
- An Occupier strike on a residential apartment in Bchamoun in the capital, Beirut, has killed at least three people, including a three-year-old girl. Footage circulating online showed at least one apartment in a building engulfed in flames. (March 24)
- Warplanes launched seven raids on the southern suburbs, targeting the areas of: Bir al-Abed, al-Ruwais – outskirts of al-Manshiyya, Haret Hreik, Sayyed Hadi Nasrallah Highway, Saint Therese, Burj al-Barajneh and al-Kafaat (March 24)
- Occupier forces hit a petrol station belonging to the Amana company in Rashidieh, near the port city of Tyre, sending a large plume of flames into the air. (March 24)
- Five paramedics were killed in an Israeli airstrike targeting the town of Zawtar al-Gharbiya in southern Lebanon. The ambulance car was destroyed. (March 28)



- An Occupier airstrike on an apartment complex in Ain Saadeh, a mountain village east of Beirut was conducted leading to 3 deaths and two severely damaged apartments. (April 6)
- On the afternoon of April 8, the Occupier launched its deadliest and most intense wave of airstrikes in Beirut since the war with Hezbollah restarted in early March. Haret Hreik, Ghobeiry, Laylaki, Hadath, Burj Al Barajneh, Tahwitat Al Ghadir, Bir Hassan, Al Rahhab, Hay al Sellom, Shiyyah/Maroun Misk, and Burj Al Barajneh/Raml al Ali —in Beirut’s southern suburbs, were targeted. Reuters claimed that at least five consecutive strikes hit Beirut city’s central areas. Reports of overwhelmed hospitals after the strikes as more than 250 killing and 1000 injured.
- On the 16th of April, Minister of Education and Higher Education, Dr. Rima Karami, expressed her strong condemnation and denunciation of this blatant bombing of a school building devoid of any military or civilian presence.
- On the 16th of April, a supply convoy was stopped midway and prevented from reaching Rmeish. The residents demanded that the Lebanese state intervene immediately to secure a safe passage to ensure the delivery of basic necessities or to facilitate the safe departure of those who wish to leave.



Iran

·**Deaths:** 2,000 to 2,500+ civilians. Injuries: +20,000.

·**Level of Devastation:** The Iranian Red Crescent said 87,294 sites have been damaged or destroyed in Iran since the start of the attacks, including residential, commercial, medical, and educational facilities, 289 medical, health, and rescue centers hit, more than 600 schools damaged or destroyed, a desalination plant destroyed which cut water to 30 villages, at least 30 fuel depots destroyed, electric infrastructure damaged caused blackouts and service disruptions in major cities.

·**IDPs:** Between 3.2 million and 4 million.

Occupied Palestine

·**Deaths:** ~25–30. Injuries: ~4,400 to 6,000.

·**Level of Devastation:** 5,000+ buildings damaged or destroyed, 10,946 claims of damaged buildings, contents/equipment, vehicles, a major hospital (Soroka) was directly hit and severely damaged, at least 1–3 schools damaged, 3 planes parked at Ben Gurion Airport damaged.

·**IDPs:** ~6,000+.

Syria

·**Deaths:** 4.

·**Damage is limited** in geographic scope compared to Lebanon or Iran.



Syria

·**Deaths:** 4.

·**Damage is limited** in geographic scope compared to Lebanon or Iran.

Iraq

·**Deaths:** 2 injured: 4.

·**Level of Devastation:** Unknown number Residential areas struck by drones and missiles in multiple regions, reports of fires, structural damage to buildings including hotels (e.g., Royal Tulip AlRasheed Hotel), diplomatic sites (Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center near Baghdad International Airport), airports, oil fields, and telecommunication towers.

United Arab Emirates

·**Deaths:** 9 Injuries: 178.

·**Level of Devastation:** homes, cars hit by debris. Limited but real civilian property damage. Dubai International Airport damaged leading to fuel tank fire and temporary shutdown of flights, Fujairah oil facilities damaged, Shah gas field operations disrupted, ports such as Jebel Ali and Port of Fujairah damaged, a few government buildings, damage near Palm Jumeirah, Burj Al Arab, and residential/commercial zones, a tower in Dubai Marina.



Kuwait

.Deaths: ~3–4 injuries: ~32.

.Level of Devastation: Some damage to Kuwait International Airport including radar system and fuel tanks, Power generation and desalination damaged, oil refineries damaged, 6 power lines damaged, debris from intercepted missiles fell on some residential areas damaging some buildings.

Oman

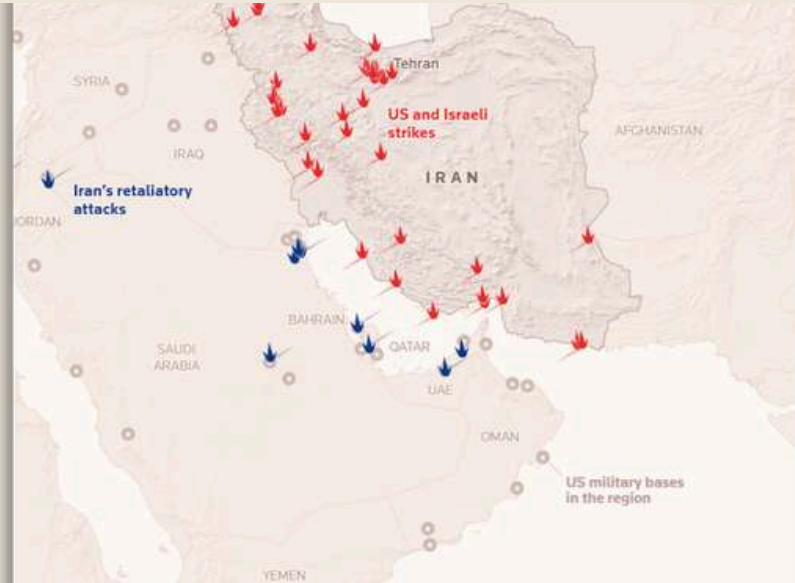
.Deaths: +7 injuries: +16.

.Level of Devastation: Oil storage tanks at Salalah port were hit, causing large fires and structural damage, Port of Duqm and Salalah Port damaged, Sohar industrial zone damaged, 2 damaged oil tankers.

Bahrain

.Deaths: +2 injuries: ~50+.

.Level of Devastation: Residential neighborhoods and commercial buildings in Manama were hit or damaged by debris, an office tower in the Seef District was struck, causing structural damage, Bahrain International Airport damaged, Mina Salman Port damaged, desalination plant was damaged, fuel depot in Muharraq Governorate was damaged, Aluminium Bahrain (Alba) confirmed an attack on its facilities.



Map Source: Institute for the Study of War & AEI Critical Threats Project

Saudi Arabia

• **Deaths:** +2 injuries: ~12.

• **Level of Devastation:** Residential building hit in AlKharj, Other potential civilian structures and neighborhoods have experienced debris and proximity damage, debris caused a localized fire and minor damage to Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura oil refinery and AramcoExxon refinery in Yanbu.



Humanitarian Response in Lebanon: (April 1-April 22)

- The Order of Malta – Lebanon, in cooperation with the Municipality of Rmeish, announced the availability of a mobile women's health clinic to provide healthcare for women of all ages.
- Jordan dispatched a second convoy of relief and medical aid to Lebanon where it was received by Jordanian ambassador and Lebanese authorities.
- To respond to increased demand linked to displacement, the ICRC conducted repairs to water infrastructure and equipped boreholes in three areas in the Bekaa region (Niha, Deir Al Ahmar) and Hermel serving 24,000 people.
- The ICRC conducted repairs on water networks in two villages (Britel and Nabi Shit) in the Bekaa reserving 45,000 people.
- The ICRC conducted repairs on main water distribution lines serving 13 collective shelters hosting about 2,000 displaced persons, as well as surrounding host communities in Jezzine district.
- The ICRC conducted repairs to water networks in Marjayoun in southern Lebanon that serve 18,000 people.
- To reinforce local capacities, the ICRC provided tools, materials and consumables to South Lebanon Water Establishment (SLWE) and Bekaa Water Establishment (BWE) to support maintenance. These included 50 batteries and 5,000 liters of engine oil for generators, spare parts for repair and two 20,000-liter fuel steel storage tanks to SLWE and a donation of hydraulic crimping tools, three electrofusion machines, and maintenance for 41 vehicles to BWE.
- The ICRC supported the continuity of essential health services in Lebanon by providing fuel to critical hospitals, including 35,000 liters to the Rafik Hariri University Hospital, 18,000 liters to Tebnine Governmental Hospital, and 40,000 liters to four hospitals in conflict-affected areas.



- To sustain operations, ICRC trucked 6,000 liters of water daily to Salah Ghandour hospital in southern Lebanon, while medical oxygen, oxygen cylinders, and other deliveries helped maintain life-saving services in nine hospitals.
- Spare parts, pumps, maintenance tools, anti-blast films, and generator consumables were also provided by ICRC to strengthen infrastructure resilience in Tebnine Governmental Hospital, alongside the installation of one generator in Sohmor Hospital in the Bekaa governorate.
- Plumbing spare parts, passive security items, maintenance tools and materials, and consumables and maintenance for generators, were provided by ICRC to hospitals including Rafik Hariri University Hospital, Tebnine, Hasbaya, Marjayoun, Sohmor, Jabal Amel, Hiram and Lebanese Italian Hospital.
- The UK government announced £20.5 million in new support for the Government of Lebanon's crisis response.
- Qatar has launched an urgent humanitarian intervention to support affected families. Funded by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) and implemented in partnership with Qatar Charity and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), the intervention will provide immediate relief assistance to displaced and crisis-affected households in Lebanon, with a total value of US\$400,000 targeting 40,500 displaced families.
- Since the beginning of the hostilities the ICRC supported 9,860 individuals in conflict-affected areas or in displacement benefited with 1,892 food parcels, 1,892 hygiene parcels, 400 mattresses, 750 blankets, and 37 tarpaulins across 11 villages.



Church Response: (April 1-April 22)

- MCC, the Mennonite Central Committee, provided 34,000 meals over 30 days at various shelters in the Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel governates.
- The Maronite Patriarchate called for the participation in a day of love and solidarity, expressing the unity of hearts and the convergence of hope. On that occasion, a meeting of His Beatitude and Eminence Cardinal Bechara Boutros al-Rahi was set up with the mayors, the supporting social institutions, and the parish priests, to learn firsthand about their needs and difficulties and to secure ways of communication between the towns that guarantees their survival.
- In a notable stop during his pastoral tour of the Jezzine district on the 19th of April, His Beatitude and Eminence Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros al-Rahi accompanied by representatives from faith based organizations such as Aid to the Church in Need and Caritas, called for the consolidation of peace and an end to the cycle of violence. He expressed hope for the continuation of international efforts and negotiations aimed at reinforcing stability.
- The aid trucks belonging to the organization “Samaritan’s Purse”, has been allowed to distribute humanitarian aid into Christian villages in South Lebanon after being allowed by the occupiers on the 19th of April.
- In the heart of the Church of the Transfiguration in Rmeish and on the 21st of April, the Papal Nuncio arrived as a cherished guest, bearing a message of love and closeness and support to the residents of Rmeish.