

## Middle East

### REGIONAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Regional Context

The Middle East region has for more than 60 years been dominated by the Israeli Palestinian conflict. With the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, another armed conflict escalated in the region that is also shaped by shifting international interests and alliances.

The Palestinian refugee problem remains unresolved and the more than five million refugees in Palestine and in the neighboring countries face hardship, poverty, hopelessness and exclusion. Resistance movements continue to work and their struggle contributes to destabilizing the host countries. Israel refuses the refugees to return to their original villages and cities. Lately, more radical forces gained ground in camps in Lebanon as in the example of Naher El Bared. Until the rights of the refugees are addressed more unrest in refugee camps can be expected.

In Iraq, threats from sectarian violence and general lack of security has caused large movement of Iraqi refugees across borders and internally displaced within Iraq. The ethnic sectarian violence has led to ethnic cleansing and segregation in many areas in Iraq. More than an estimated two million Iraqis now live in Jordan and Syria, with smaller numbers of Iraqi refugees living in other Middle Eastern countries. This situation affects Jordan and Syria because of these countries limited resources and lack of ability to address the needs of the large influx of refugees. The situation in Iraq influences the whole region because of the spill-over effect from the security situation in the country. The involvement and interference by international actors, including the USA and Iran, adds to preparing the ground for radical forces and increased Al-Qaida influence in the country. This leads to further instability and internal fighting.

In the Palestinian territory, infighting between the ruling party Hamas and the Fatah opposition led to a political crisis and Hamas took control over the Gaza Strip while Fatah control the West Bank, leading to two separate governing structures in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are in a particularly vulnerable situation after a period of international boycott against the governing Hamas party who lacked income to pay for governmental salaries and basic services to people. Poverty is widespread and there are few job opportunities. Israeli military activities in the Gaza Strip continue and add fear and hardship in the life of the civilian population.

Lebanon is in a very delicate situation, with a weak government and increased influence from factions of the different religious, ethnic and political camps. Internal conflict within these factions adds to the instability of Lebanese politics and political system. Within all groups, Christian, Muslim, Druse, and others, radical blocks can be observed. The Shiite Hezbollah party has increased influence in society and appears stronger than before the war with Israel in summer 2006. Influence by outside regimes and groups leaves Lebanon in a vulnerable situation.

Although Syria has redrawn its troops from Lebanon, it still exercises considerable influence and has the support of many ordinary Lebanese, as well as parliamentarians. People are awaiting the coming presidential elections with anxiety. The worst scenario is that they will not be able to form a government or that there will be two governments. The border issue with Israel is not resolved and there are fears of an outbreak of a new war. The towns and villages in South Lebanon took the brunt of the fighting between

Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 and the destruction was devastating. South Lebanon is the poorest part of Lebanon and with the destruction from the war rehabilitation intervention in this area is needed for years to come. With the devastating fractionalization of Lebanon facilitating cross religious cooperation in the communities will be important.

The rest of the region is regarded as relatively stable with functioning political systems and governments in control. Democratic principles as freedom of speech and media, the independence of civil society and freedom of association is not protected and while elections is held they are not considered as free from political misuse of power. The radicalization of Islam is seen by some as a democratizing force while by other feared to be a source of instability in a longer perspective.

It is a negative trend in the whole region that Christians are leaving. Christians are leaving for different reasons. Many leave because of economic hardship while others leave because of an increase in sectarian conflict. The situation is in particular critical for the Christians of Iraq. Reports of increasing hardship for the Christian community in Syria may be consider as a spill-over effect of the sectarian division in Iraq. Christians live as minorities Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt in addition to Lebanon.

## **2.0 NCA's Added Value**

### **At Present**

With its long standing support to church-based partners in the Middle East NCA has developed good relations and experience working in the region. The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) provides the network that includes all the countries of priority for NCA while project cooperation with MECC is at present in Lebanon and Palestine.

The work is long-term with a focus on strengthening the capacity of partner organizations to continue provide relevant services to vulnerable people, to play a role in civil society, and work for the fulfillment of basic rights. The partner organizations are providing essential services in the field of health and education in West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza Strip for marginalized Palestinians that have their economic, social and cultural rights violated.

Partner organizations in Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Egypt work closely with the grassroots and are considered reliable and accountable. Topics of mutual concern are discussed with partner organization during annual seminars that ensures coordination. The program also includes work against gender based violence and efforts to mobilize religions for conflict transformation and peace building.

Advocacy is central to the program in Israel and Palestine. NCA has established good cooperation with the World Council of Churches and since 2002 implementing the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) with the aim of offering protection, monitor violations of human rights and advocating with the churches for a just peace. Advocacy is also brought up internationally through coordination in APRODEV.

NCA in Iraq is mainly concerned with emergency assistance to the population in war-torn Iraq. The largest efforts are in the field the water and reconstruction activities. NCA staff monitors the implementation and work for sustainability and community participation in the planning and implementation. NCA has worked in Iraq since 1997 and has gained considerable experience in implementing projects under difficult security conditions. Work against gender-based violence and psycho-social support to children and youth is arranged in cooperation with local organizations. Women groups in Iraq are strengthen by capacity building and networking.

## **Ambitions**

- Support organizational development and strategic planning in partner organizations.
- Support building capacity on emergency preparedness and establishment of emergency preparedness plans in the Palestinian territory, Lebanon and Jordan in cooperation with local partner organizations.
- Develop a regional gender program in cooperation with the NCA Iraq office working towards the fulfillment of UN Resolution 1325, women's participation and protection.
- Create arenas for cross religious interaction, cooperation and democratic processes through community rehabilitation initiatives, targeting general communities and youth.

## **3.0 Thematic Focus**

NCA in the Middle East will be working with the following themes for the period 2008-2009:

### **3.1 Civil society for Accountable Governance**

NCA will work to strengthen partner organizations ability to play a role in civil society in the Middle East. Church-based organizations will be supported with capacity building and training in order to strengthen their ability to meet the needs of people and to contribute to building independent civil society organizations that are able to mobilize for people's rights. Women's organizations are also central in this work and in Iraq NCA will continue to strengthen women's ability to organize and network.

### **3.2 Communities for Fresh Water, Safe Sanitation and Infrastructure**

NCA in Iraq will further develop the reconstruction work in Iraq in the field of water, sanitation and infrastructure by working for increased community participation and to develop competence in hygiene. Efforts will be made to further build experiences and competence in local staff competence in how to increase local community participation in planning and implementation.

An assessment will be conducted to explore the possibilities for NCA to work with water and sanitation also in the occupied Palestinian territories.

### **3.3 Men and Women address Gender based Violence**

There is a high level of political violence that also impact gender relations in the home. There are reports of increased domestic violence and the occurrence of honor killings continue in both Muslim and the Christian communities. Women lack protection in countries like Iraq and Palestine torn by war, conflict and lawlessness. NCA will work for the right to protection as well as right to participation of women as described in the UNSR 1325 on women, peace and security. Efforts to strengthen women's ability to organize, to create networks and regional cooperation in the field of gender-based violence and gender equality will be strengthened by consolidating efforts in Iraq and Palestine and to increase regional cooperation between women organizations.

### **3.4 Religions for Conflict Transformation and Peace Building**

NCA will work for the strengthening of church-based partner organizations in the Middle East recognizing their important role in building civil society and mobilizing for the rights

of the marginalized. NCA will focus on working to strengthen advocacy skills of church-based partner organizations and in particular to advocate for rights of Palestinians with regards to Jerusalem. In Iraq some efforts will be made to facilitate contact and cooperation between religious actors in south Iraq.

### 3.5 Equity through Economic and Social, Cultural Rights

NCA will continue support to partner organizations that work to fulfill people's economic, social and cultural rights by providing access to basic services in the field of health and education. Mounting humanitarian crisis and a crisis in governmental institutions necessitates and approach in which partner organizations are enabled to respond and meet needs that are relevant to the poor and marginalized population.

## 4.0 Geographical Focus and Presence

<b>Focus Countries</b>	<b>NCA Presence and Follow-up</b>	<b>Professional Capacity</b>
<b>Israel/Palestine</b>	NCA Area Representative based in Jerusalem.	Projects in the field of women's rights, right to education, health services, and capacity building of partner organizations.
<b>Other Countries of Priority</b>		
<b>Iraq</b>	Main office in Amman Jordan, support office in Kuwait, offices in Basrah and Baghdad inside Iraq.	Projects in the areas of; water/sanitation, shelters/reconstruction, youth centers and democracy/human rights.
<b>Lebanon</b>	Monitored by NCA Area Representative based in Jerusalem.	Preparation for emergency response capacity, rehabilitation projects.
<b>Egypt</b>	Monitored by NCA Area Representative based in Jerusalem.	Project cooperation with work against FGH.
<b>Jordan</b>	Followed-up by NCA Area Representative based in Jerusalem. NCA Irak office is placed in Amman, Jordan.	
<b>Syria</b>	Followed-up by NCA Area Representative based in Jerusalem.	No current projects, but network contact with local church community.
<b>Iran</b>	Followed-up by NCA Area Representative based in Jerusalem.	No current projects, but with emergency response capacity.

## 5.0 Monitoring and Evaluation

The program will be monitored through visits by NCA local and international staff. Monitoring and cooperation is also done by partner participation in annual partner meetings and regular visits. Egypt is visited at least once a year and at least twice a year to Lebanon.

In Iraq the program will be monitored through visits in the field by NCA local staff inside Iraq, by regular management meetings in Kuwait, good financial routines and monthly progress reports. Periodical narrative and financial reports will be received and given feedback from all programs. The financial manager in Amman will provide support securing financial procedures and management advice to all programs. An evaluation of the FGM program in cooperation with BLESS in Egypt to be conducted during the period.