



Bad news from the Middle East

The information about the war in the Middle East hit the world on 12 July 2006. Our attention again focused intensively on that narrow strip along the eastern Mediterranean Coast. Questions were asked: how long this time? Christian churches of all denominations all over the world started regular prayer meetings for peace and also sought to find out how to help. The military action in Lebanon and northern Israel continued for over one month until the ceasefire agreement was signed on Aug. 14.

The conflict has killed over a thousand people, mostly Lebanese civilians, damaged Lebanese infrastructure (airports, roads, bridges, electric power stations and also ... people’s homes), displaced about a million Lebanese and 500,000 Israelis, and disrupted normal life all over Lebanon and northern Israel.¹ Countless civilians on both sides of the border suffered dramatically from psychological trauma, emotional hurts and other awful experiences that this war had caused. The horrible memories can’t be erased from the minds of people who lost their dear ones, were severely injured or agonized otherwise. And the process of healing and rebuilding takes time and requires a lot of help.



Some excerpts from the recent correspondence since the war started

From the letter of **the IMP Coordinator** sent on July 18, 2006:

“We hear again about unrest in Lebanon and Israel and are worried. Hope that emails get to you. Be assured of our sympathy and prayers for you, your families and churches. Numerous churches around the world uplift you in prayers. We do pray for the safety of all our Baptist brothers and sisters both in Lebanon and Israel including tourists and strangers. We pray for peace to your troubled nations. Are IMP church planters in Lebanon safe? Can they continue their ministry? Can you travel in your country?”

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org> and www.debka.com

The response to this email came from **Chaouki Boulos**, the Local IMP Coordinator:

"We try to keep in touch with our IMP people in Lebanon. We know they are alive. The Baptist churches still hold meetings. It is easier for those that are far from trouble (in the north of Lebanon). In Beirut all churches organize prayer meetings for peace and are involved in relief work with the displaced. The war started on July 12th, and for us it was the first day of our annual evangelistic celebration. In spite of the situation, we decided to hold the first night on schedule, and more than 750 people attended. July 13th was the second day of the war and the situation in the country deteriorated drastically. Although people felt unrest and tension, more than 450 showed up the second night. On July 14th, we had to stop the celebration and dismantled the lights, sound system, and the stage. What took us 2 weeks to put up came down in only 5 hours..."



The Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development Executive Director, **Nabil Costa** sent daily information about activities aimed at helping the needy refugees in Beirut etc. According to his information:



Beirut Baptist School building as it is today - with the laundry of the displaced families hanging from the windows

"The Baptist Centre and the nearby Beirut Baptist School have provided shelter and food to an estimated 1,000 people displaced by the conflict. Most of the refugees have come from hard-hit Shiite regions of Lebanon to the relative safety of the Christian parts of Beirut. International Baptist relief workers, including a medical team from Hungarian Baptist Aid and church groups from the United States have provided indispensable services to the refugees including food, water, medicine and other essentials. Refugee families crowd the classrooms at the schools,

their laundry hanging out the windows. Baptists and other volunteers prepare meals, clean, play with the children and do what they can to create a safe refuge in the midst of a terrible situation. Thank you very much for all your help from EBF. We are passing through difficult times, although today it was quiet to a certain extent. We pray that political efforts will succeed and that they find a lasting solution to our country, so that we will continue to be the light for Jesus Christ."

After missiles fell in Nazareth-Israel, a Christian leader **Botrus Mansour** from the town wrote:

"We hold a Bible study in the Baptist church on Wednesday evenings. Where we going to cancel it because of the shock and dismay in town?! No way. We decided we will convert the meeting to a prayer meeting. We had prayed the day before too for peace in the region. Terrifying experiences of missiles coming down from the sky close to where we live make us ask "purpose driven" questions: Did Jesus put us in His hometown randomly? It was less than a mile away from where the missile hit the empty garage in Nazareth that the Prince of Peace was born."²

² www.comeandsee.com

A Lebanese **church planter** that is supported by IMP wrote in his report (EBF in cooperation with Mission Partners is supporting several church planters in the Middle East):

“Though chances to preach in local churches are a privilege which I do not like to lose, I am now more focused on small group meetings, and house churches. I announced to fellow Christians that I was going to hold a meeting at my house on Saturday evenings. We were eleven persons, sometimes up to sixteen. And before the growth of this group, two people asked me to have another meeting at their houses, which were located in different areas and at different times. So we have a Sunday morning service with three families, about sixteen adults, youth and children. These meetings are growing with new attendees, some new converts and neighbors. I appreciate your prayers for equipping group leaders as well as discipleship of new believers. Pray also that new houses may be open for the ministry of our Lord and Savior. To Him alone is all glory!”

Attitudes

This war showed the fragility of human life again. The closer to the conflict the more intensely could the enormous suffering be experienced... In the midst of this tragedy the mere solidarity and humanitarian help were demonstrated as very basic reflexes expressed towards the people of Lebanon and Israel. Baptists and other Christians from around the world united in regular prayers for peace and tried to provide practical help to the suffering ... disregarding all barriers which would have divided them otherwise. This war has reminded us again of our basic human duties ... including sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Daniel Trusiewicz
EBF Mission Coordinator

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