



Date: 6 January 2007

To: Middle East & European Partners

**Re: Invitation from MECC – Unit on Education & Renewal
Youth Program**

**Study Seminar & Encounter for Youth on the theme:
"East - West Intercultural Youth Dialogue & Mutual Understanding"**

28 January – 3 February 2007

**St Christophoros Greek Orthodox Conference Centre
Saydnaya - Damascus/Syria**

Wahida Shaffi – a UK resident is invited to this conference in light of her vast experience in the areas of intercultural dialogue in Britain and indeed the world. *She will take on the role of trainer*, working with young people from all over the globe enabling them to recognize and learn about the value of dialogue and peace in world, as well as facilitating discussion on the many complexities facing the world and the power of young people in inspiring peace and sustained dialogue.

The information below outlines the main aims of the program detailing the length of Wahida Shaffi's stay and what this will entail for the duration she is there. This also includes contact details of people you can contact in Syria who will be able to assist you further in any further enquiries that you may have concerning Miss Shaffi's visit to Syria.

PLEASE READ THE COMPLETE INVITATION LETTER CAREFULLY

INTRODUCTION

The MECC Youth Program has long history of encounters with youth organizations in Europe & Africa. The encounters and study seminars have developed better learning, understanding and relationships between young people of the different continents.

In the course of political, social and religious changes and challenges in the world, the MECC feels the importance of bringing youth from East and West into an encounter, visit and study seminar to raise issues of common concerns. It is obvious that there are many misunderstandings, mis-interpretations and some ignorance about the political, religious and cultural situations and changes on both sides.

Working from the conviction of the importance of breaking the walls of misunderstandings and building bridges of cultural dialogues, the MECC is proposing such an initiative.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the study seminar is to:

"Provide an ecumenical space for young people from the Middle East and Europe to exchange their understandings and experiences about the religious and cultural situations in their regions".

The objectives of the study seminar are as follows:

- ***To share cultural differences and commonalities.***
- ***To exchange experiences and learning about living with religious pluralities in both regions.***
- ***To provide a space of dialogue of cultures towards an environment of peace.***
- ***To identify the role of youth work in developing common understandings of each cultures & society.***

PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

The MECC Youth Program has identified the proposed target groups for the study seminar as follows:

- 1- Young people from MECC constituency and youth movements in the Middle East region (20 to 30 years old), from countries of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Cyprus.
 - They should be actively involved in youth work in their churches and /or church related organizations.
 - They should have the capability of dialogue, learning, exchange experiences, and use the acquired knowledge and understanding in their youth work back in their constituency.
 - They should speak English fluently.
 - Gender balance is required.
 - The MECC Youth Program has the capacity of inviting Christian youth organization and movements in the MECC region within its network such as WSCF, YMCA, YWCA and others.
- 2- Young people from Europe (20-27 years old). It is expected that young people would represent various countries in Europe as well as Christian organizations, and youth movements within their networks.
- 3- The staff of the World Council of Churches - Youth Team is invited.
- 4- Muslim participation is subject to negotiation with MECC.
- 5- The total number of participation suggested for the study seminar is (25) from Europe and Middle East. (15) from Middle East - (12) from Europe.

VENUE OF THE SEMINAR

The meeting will be held at: **St Christophoros Conference Centre Saydnaya - (25 Km) North of Damascus - Syria**

The Venue of meeting will: the same

Address: Saydnaya, (25 Km) North of Damascus - Syria

ACCOMODATION:

St Christophoros Conference Centre Saydnaya -
(25 Km) North of Damascus - Syria

ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

Sunday, 28 January 2007 is the day of arrival.

Saturday, 3 February 2007 is the day of departure.

- ◆ Participants who are arriving by plane to the Damascus airport will be met at the airport on the condition of knowing their arrival schedule.

Participants arriving by cars or buses from the ME region need to go directly to St Christophoros Conference Centre Saydnaya -
(25 Km) North of Damascus - Syria

- ◆ *Please* make sure to arrive and depart as scheduled.
- ◆ Any extra days of accommodation will be charged to your personal account unless otherwise approved earlier by MECC.

BACKGROUND OF THE SEMINAR

The recent political and religious events in the world and particularly in the Middle East have widened the gap between the East and the West. People are encountering many misunderstandings and misinterpretations about issues of human rights, secularism, and religiosity. The world today is facing many challenges that prohibit peace from finding its way in societies. Fundamentalism versus modernism, violence versus peace, religious conservatism versus religious openness, secularism versus traditionalism: these are issues that, unfortunately, contribute to the destruction of the relationships between humans. Building bridges between East and West on the level of youth will ultimately lead to better understanding and better cooperation for peace education. Many organizations in the world are endeavoring to maintain peace, justice and cultural dialogue in the world. The more work is done in this respect the more violation of human dignity is encountered. The MECC - Youth Program will endeavor, in the process of this study seminar, to explore ways and means of advocating for dialogue of cultures rather than clashes. The situation of young Christians in the Middle East is challenged, in this respect, with its presence due to cultural and religious pressure on them. Nevertheless, they still can have a role in the world for dialogue of cultures.

THEME OF THE SEMINAR

The theme of the seminar is chosen to reflect the needs of the Middle Eastern youth for dialogue with other cultures. European youth are the main target for this seminar.

METHODS

- ◆ The MECC Youth Program is emphasizing on the active learning method for the study seminar. This may include the active

involvement of the participants, field visits, research papers done by the participants, sharing personal and group experiences and stories, and discussions.

- ◆ Social interaction, community life, ice-breaking methods and spiritual enrichments are applicable.
- ◆ While we assume that all participants will come with a spirit and attitude of respect and acceptance of others, yet we foresee that they will be challenged with the diversity of people and differences of cultures. Such an issue will be considered within the program by allocating enough time for ice-breaking, interaction and dialoguing about personal stories.
- ◆ It is expected from participants at the beginning of the seminar to identify some of the misunderstandings, share and discuss common religious and cultural values that could lead to overcome these misunderstandings between the two cultures.
- ◆ Other learning inputs will be shared by some guest speakers from the Middle East and Europe regions.
- ◆ We expect from participants to discuss ways and means of overcoming the misunderstandings and develop ways of networking and following up on the outcomes of the seminar.
- ◆ Field visits, cultural evenings, outing for cultural interaction will be included in the program. Intercultural learning is a basic part of the program of visits which will allow participants to experience the beauty of diversity of cultures.

TIMETABLE

A tentative timetable will be provided for the participants by the beginning of January 2007.

PARTICIPATION FEES

A participation fee of US\$ 20 for each person is applicable.

TRAVEL SUBSIDIES & ARRANGEMENTS

- ◆ The MECC-Youth Program will be responsible for paying the travel, board and lodging for participants from the Middle East.
- ◆ The MECC-Youth Program will be responsible for paying **only** the board and lodging for participants from Europe.
- ◆ European participants are responsible for paying their own travel expenses to and from Syria.
- ◆ ***For Middle Eastern Participants:*** Please contact MECC office in your country for travel arrangements:

Cairo Office: +20 2 638 3616 (Mr Shaher Louka)

Amman Office: +962 6 515 0930 (Ms Wafa Ghousous)

Lebanon Office: +961 1 353 938 (Ms Randa Houry)

VISA REQUIREMENTS:

- ◆ All Europeans require entry Visa to Syria. Visas can be obtained from any Syrian Embassy near your place.

- ◆ ***Please apply for a "Tourist" visa.*** The MECC can provide an invitation letter on request.
- ◆ ***If your passport has an Israeli stamp in it, PLEASE DO NOT APPLY OR CHANGE YOUR PASSPORT BEFORE YOU APPLY.***
- ◆ Middle East participants do not require entry visa to Syria.

LANGUAGE OF THE SEMINAR

The main language of the seminar will be ***English***.

It is **obligatory** for the Middle Eastern participants to communicate in English.

Translation into Arabic is not provided.

WEATHER PROFILE

The weather is normally expected to be cold. It is very possible that it may rain or even snow. The temperature is expected to be (1c low - 10 c High) Please bring with you winter clothes. (Jackets and coats.....)

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATION

The deadline for receiving applications is:

10 January 2007

CONTACTS in Syria

Middle East Council of Churches

Unit on Education & Renewal/Youth Program

PO Box 3678,

Kostaki Homsy Str, Ani Bldg, 4th Floor, Azizieh Area - Aleppo - Syria

Tel: +963 21 212 5676

Fax: +963 21 212 5676

Director: *Mr Razek Siriani*

Email: rsiriani@scs-net.org

www.meccyouth.org

Seminar Coordinator: *Ms Rania Touma*

raniaflavie@hotmail.com