



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The Director-General of UNESCO voices his alarm over the resumption of tensions in the Old City of Jerusalem

The Director-General of UNESCO has expressed his deep concern over the work initiated by the Israeli authorities on the site of the Old City of Jerusalem, which is protected by the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). By virtue of this Convention, the site is inscribed on the World Heritage List and on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The Director-General has written to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in order to ensure that the work undertaken – the plans of which have not been forwarded to UNESCO – does not, in any way, undermine the outstanding universal value of the Old City of Jerusalem. In particular, he recalled the decision reached by the World Heritage Committee in 2006 at its last session in Vilnius (Lithuania), in which the Committee declared its "concern as to the obstacles and practices, such as archaeological excavations or new constructions, which could alter the outstanding universal value of the cultural heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem, including its urban and social fabric as well as its visual integrity" and requested "the Israeli authorities to provide to the World Heritage Centre all relevant information concerning the new buildings planned in and around the Western Wall Plaza, including the plans for the reconstruction of the access leading to the al-Haram ash-Sharīf".

The distinctive character of the Old City of Jerusalem derives, in particular, from the close relationship between the historical and religious buildings and the peoples living with them. The Director-General added that interfering with the delicate balance among the symbols of the three monotheistic religions would entail running the risk of undermining the respect for sacred beliefs.

For this reason, the Director-General is launching a vigorous appeal to all people of good will to cease any action that could lead to tensions, whose magnitude can not be foreseen at this time. The wisest course would be to suspend any action that could endanger the spirit of mutual respect until such time as the will to dialogue prevails once again.

Author(s): Press Release N°2007-10 - Source: UNESCOPRESS - Publication Date: 08-02-2007
© UNESCO 1995-2007 - ID: 36734