
UNESCO expert mission to assess state of Old Jerusalem

UNESCO will send a mission of experts in mid-May to examine the state of conservation of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls, a World Heritage site. The mission will be composed of experts from UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural property (ICCROM). The latter two are advisory bodies to the World Heritage Committee.

The last monitoring mission to Jerusalem took place in 2004. In 2010, the World Heritage Committee requested a new mission. This was reiterated in 2011 and 2012.

At the request of UNESCO's Executive Board, Director-General Irina Bokova held wide-ranging consultations with several Member States to reach an agreement with the concerned parties for the mission to go ahead. That agreement has now been reached, as was announced at the Executive Board on 23 April.

"I trust that this agreement marks a turning point for all parties concerned, to work together on the technical issues that are essential for the safeguarding of such an important World Heritage site," the Director-General said. "This type of technical collaboration lies at the heart of UNESCO's challenging mission to make dialogue possible between cultures and peoples. With this agreement, the result of collaboration and demonstrated will to overcome the difficulties, we have made a significant step in the right direction."

The mission members will work with the concerned parties to identify appropriate operational and financial mechanisms and modalities to strengthen technical cooperation in the framework of the UNESCO Action Plan for the City of Old Jerusalem. This plan, prepared between 2005 and 2007, is based on a thorough inventory and consultations with the communities concerned and includes 18 conservation projects throughout the Old City.

The findings and recommendations of the mission will be submitted to the Director-General and presented to the World Heritage Committee at its next session, to be held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in June 2013.