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REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF GAZA: IMPLEMENTATION OF 187 EX/DECISION 42

SUMMARY

This document is presented in compliance with 187 EX/Decision 42. It summarizes progress made by UNESCO since the 187th session of the Executive Board in providing assistance to the reconstruction and development of the Gaza Strip.

There are no financial or administrative implications.

No decision is proposed.

1. This document presents an update on the UNESCO response to the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip since the 187th session of the Executive Board. It covers the period from August to December 2011. During the period under review, UNESCO continues to contribute to the United Nations humanitarian response in Gaza with a view to moving from emergency to early recovery and development. Interventions remain focused on the educational needs of the children and youth, as well as on the protection of cultural heritage sites at risk.

2. All activities were implemented through the Gaza Antenna Office, which is situated in the UNDP compound in Gaza City, and falls under the direct supervision of the UNESCO Ramallah Office.

EDUCATION

3. The emergency education programme, which started in 2009, is completed in its present phase and is subject to an external evaluation in January/February 2012, while the second phase is ready to be launched, with a set of new projects addressing persisting gaps and based on lessons learned. Over the past six months, activities focused on continued support for higher education institutions, as well as assistance to some of the most vulnerable primary and secondary schools in the Gaza Strip, where an integrated programme was implemented aimed at enhancing the quality of education and making the school environment safer.

4. These activities were made possible thanks to financial contributions from Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser of Qatar and from the Islamic Development Bank (the latter within the scope of the Programme of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip).

5. The following activities were implemented;

(a) **Support to higher education.** The scheduled delivery and installation of material and equipment for the science faculties of two universities in Gaza is close to completion, after delays were experienced owing to the ongoing blockade of the strip. The project is expected to be completed by the end of February 2012.

(b) **Schools as safe zones** (crisis-disaster risk reduction). Activities for this project entered their second phase in April 2011, with a subsequent

extension in November- December covered with a contribution from the regular programme. The pilot crisis-Disaster Risk Reduction (c-DRR) Programme, which was originally targeting 12 government schools located in the access restricted areas close to the Israeli border, was expanded to another 17 vulnerable schools, drawn from a list of the most vulnerable ones in the Gaza strip which were identified by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education through the database of the UNSC Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for Children Affected by Armed Conflict. These schools benefited from an integrated training and community development package which combines education and protection elements and which was developed by applying the principles of education for Disaster Risk Reduction to the situation of protracted conflict. Beneficiary schools received trainings on first aid, safety awareness and good practice, psychosocial support, and human rights monitoring and reporting. Moreover, an additional two activities were introduced for all 29 participating schools. These comprise school-based trainings on the INEE minimum standards (focused on the development of school-based contingency plans), and the introduction of an SMS alert system for each of the schools. The latter allows for timely messages focused on the safety and security of students during difficult periods to be transmitted among the 29 educational communities. This intervention took pride of place at the roundtable of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack held in Thailand in November 2011.

6. Making schools safer is of crucial importance given the grave consequences on the lives and the wellbeing of both Palestinian and Israeli children. According to the information gathered by the Protection Cluster's Working Group on grave violations against children, of which UNESCO is a member, nine Palestinian and Israeli children, aged between one and 17, were reported killed during the period covered by this document (information available for August-October 2011). Eleven incidents of attacks on schools and fourteen incidents of denial of access to education were reported in Gaza, West Bank and Israel from July to October 2011. In addition, UNESCO received data and information from the Israeli authorities on the harmful effects of continuous exposure to missile attacks from Gaza on the condition of children in the south of Israel; damaging their development, mental state and scholastic abilities.

7. As part of its safe schools project in Gaza, UNESCO raises awareness and trains teachers, officials from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and community members, on Human Rights and the Monitoring and Reporting mechanism on grave violations against children, resulting in better awareness of their rights as well as regular and proactive response to this mechanism whenever applicable.

8. In addition to these activities, UNESCO continued its support to the INEE minimum standards community of practice established in Gaza as an outcome of the programme, which took part in a global meeting to share experiences and plan new action. This community is called to have a critical role in the subsequent phase of the programme. The report on the right to education in the occupied Palestinian territory is in the latest stages of completion and will become a useful advocacy tool for all education practitioners in the area.

9. UNESCO is also supporting education in Gaza through its regular programme and in close coordination with activities implemented in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory by the wider United Nations Country Team. Gaza is part of a UNESCO-led effort for the development of a United Nations package of support to early childhood development and inclusive and child-friendly education in the occupied Palestinian territory (see document 189 EX/19 on Educational and Cultural Institutions in the occupied Palestinian territory).

10. Operational progress was discussed with donors during the Steering Committee of the UNESCO/Her Highness Office Partnership on Education in conflict-affected areas held in Paris on 6 January 2012. New project proposals for the second phase under discussion include the extension of the safe school projects to the whole list of the most vulnerable schools in Gaza; enhanced support to teachers for psychosocial support to children as integral part of their professional development; continued support to the application of the INEE minimum standards in Gaza and in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory; and continued support to higher education institutions. Other proposals to be further discussed include specific support to the preparation of the Tawjihi exam and enhanced support to TVET in the Gaza strip targeting the communities most in need.

CULTURE

11. Technical assistance for the conservation of the archaeological site of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer in Nuseirat, south of Gaza City, is ensured through a partnership between UNESCO and the French Cooperation and the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem. During autumn 2011, international experts, assisted by local professionals, including professors of architectural conservation at the Islamic University of Gaza, rescued key parts of the Byzantine site from collapse and irreversible loss, such as mosaics floors and the crypt where it is believed is buried the body of Saint Hilarion, founder of the monastic life in the Levant. Intervention at the site, supported by regular programme budget and the Government of Switzerland, is key in preventing looting and illicit trafficking of archaeological artefacts, a plague that is unfortunately growing in a territory which lacks appropriate measures for combating illegal trade and export.

12. Concerning Tell Rafah site, located at the border with Egypt, UNESCO is currently discussing with local authorities the possibility of cooperation to ensure the effective protection of the site and its movable properties. To this end, UNESCO is supporting the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in establishing a National Register of cultural heritage sites and archaeological artefacts, including the digital database of uncovered and removed artefacts in the oPt since 1967.

13. Recently, in January 2012, UNESCO, jointly with the French partners active in Gaza, participated in the operation aimed at protecting another site which, as Tell Umm Amer, is inscribed in the Palestinian inventory of potential World Heritage sites, notably Anthedon Harbour or Blakheh. The site, situated in the northern sector of the Gaza Strip, near Beach Refugee Camp, embodies the remnants of the ancient port of Gaza, testifying centuries of different influences, from Phoenicians and Persians to the Romans. The site is currently threatened by urban development plans.

14. In Gaza, within the MDG-Fund Joint Programme on Culture and Development, UNESCO, in cooperation with UN Women, is promoting the revival of quality handicraft focusing on jewellery and other traditional crafts.