



Executive Board

Hundred and ninety-ninth session

199 EX/19

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Item 19 of the provisional agenda

OCCUPIED PALESTINE

SUMMARY

This document is submitted pursuant to [197 EX/32](#), by which item entitled "Occupied Palestine" was included in the 199th session of the Executive Board. The present document provides a report on developments since the 197th session of the Executive Board.

There are no financial or administrative implications.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 24.

I.

A. Jerusalem

1. The Norwegian Government and UNESCO signed in December 2011 an agreement for the project "Ensuring the sustainability of the Centre for the Restoration of Islamic Manuscripts of the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem". The project's main objective is to build the Centre's staff capacities in the preservation of Islamic manuscripts. Since the outset of the project, five additional staff have been recruited for the Centre and 12 training sessions totalling 1,370 hours of teaching on conservation and restoration techniques have been held so far, in addition to study tours to restoration centres in Paris and Florence in 2013. The project also provided the Centre with conservation equipment and materials. UNESCO conducted four consultation missions in 2014/15. The stakeholders are currently discussing the possible new phase of the project to be implemented beyond 2016.

2. The refurbishment of the Islamic Museum in the Haram Al-Sharif and its Collection is currently on hold as it requires additional funding to complete the proposed museographical and scenographical planning, which was approved in March 2015 by the Awqaf authorities. A follow-up mission took place in June 2015. The re-opening of the Museum depends on the availability of additional funds, and is foreseen beyond 2016.

B. Al-Aqsa Mosque/al-Haram ash-Sharif and its surroundings

(1) Al-Aqsa Mosque/al-Haram ash-Sharif

3. The 39th session of the World Heritage Committee (Decision 39 COM 7A.27) as well as the 197th session of the Executive Board ([197 EX/Decision 32](#)) expressed deep concern regarding the situation at the al-Aqsa Mosque/al-Haram ash-Sharif. They also expressed concern regarding impediments to free access to the site, in particular for the Jordanian Waqf experts, to safeguard the site. They furthermore expressed concern on *"plans to build a two-line cable car system in East Jerusalem"*. They underlined the necessity to respect and safeguard the integrity, authenticity and cultural heritage of Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, as an integral part of the World Heritage site of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls. The World Heritage Committee also requested the World Heritage Centre to continue applying the Reinforced Monitoring Mechanism to the World Heritage site. The 15th Reinforced Monitoring Report is under preparation, and a State of Conservation report will be presented to the 40th session of the World Heritage Committee that will be held in July 2016 in Istanbul (Turkey). By a *note verbale* dated 29 October 2015, the Permanent Delegation of Palestine has transmitted to the Secretariat a statement from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem referring to the importance of *"reasonable access"* to all Holy Sites.

(2) Ascent to the Mughrabi Gate in al-Aqsa Mosque/al-Haram ash-Sharif

4. Pursuant to 176 EX/Special Plenary Meeting/Decision and to the decisions of the World Heritage Committee since its 31st session in 2007, the World Heritage Centre has spared no efforts to facilitate exchanges between Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and Waqf experts regarding the design of the Mughrabi Ascent in the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as to facilitate the UNESCO reactive monitoring mission to the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls and a UNESCO experts meeting on the Mughrabi Ascent.

5. These matters were inscribed on the agenda of the Executive Board since the 176th Executive Board Special Plenary meeting, as well as since the 192nd session, and the state of conservation of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls is also presented annually to the World Heritage Committee.

6. Regarding the Ascent to the Mughrabi Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, the 197th session of the Executive Board *"deprecated*

the continuing Israeli unilateral measures and decisions regarding the Ascent to the Mughrabi Gate". On the same subject, the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee, expressed "growing concern regarding the continuous, intrusive demolitions and illegal excavations in and around the Mughrabi Gate Ascent". They both reiterated their request to enable the Jordanian Awqaf experts to maintain and safeguard the site.

C. UNESCO reactive monitoring mission to the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls and UNESCO experts meeting on the Mughrabi Ascent

7. The 39th session of the World Heritage Committee and the 197th session of the Executive Board took similar Decisions regarding the follow-up on the UNESCO reactive monitoring mission to the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls and the UNESCO experts meeting on the Mughrabi Ascent. By [197 EX/Decision 32](#), and by Decision 39 COM 7A.27, the Executive Board and the World Heritage Committee stressed the need of the urgent implementation of the UNESCO reactive monitoring mission to the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls. The 39th session of the World Heritage Committee also stressed that "*in case of non-implementation according to the above mentioned Executive Board decision 196 EX/Decision 26.4, decides to consider, in conformity with the provisions of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972, adequate measures to have the concerned party implement it*". The Executive Board and the World Heritage Committee requested that the report and recommendations of the mission be presented to the concerned parties prior to the following session of the Executive Board.

8. At the time of the preparation of this document, this monitoring mission and experts meeting could not be undertaken. Should additional information become available to the Secretariat regarding the above-mentioned matters, the Director-General is prepared to publish an addendum to this document before the 199th session of the Executive Board in order to inform the Members of the Executive Board of any new developments in that regard.

II.

A Reconstruction and development of Gaza (July 2015-January 2016)

9. This part of the document presents an overview of UNESCO's recovery response efforts in Gaza. A more general overview of UNESCO's technical assistance, capacity-building efforts, and implementation of a wide array of development-oriented projects in Palestine, including in Gaza, is provided in document 199 EX/20.

Education

10. With the financial support from the Saudi Committee for the Relief of Palestinian People, UNESCO continues to support two university libraries in Gaza. These libraries provide vulnerable higher education students with access to study and research facilities, textbooks and other resource materials. More than 8,000 students benefited from the libraries' services in the Gaza Strip.

11. UNESCO continued to successfully coordinate the EFA Package in Palestine. In support of the EFA agenda in Palestine, and within the UN/MoEHE EFA Package, special focus was given to inclusive and child-friendly education, through pilot child-led activities/innovative teaching and learning in 26 schools in Gaza strip (20 governmental schools and 6 UNRWA ones). More information about the related project "Improving Access to Quality Education for Palestinian Children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip" can be found in document 199 EX/20.

Culture

12. At the **archaeological site of Tell Umm Amer (Saint Hilarion Monastery)**, which is inscribed on the Palestine Tentative list, UNESCO implemented urgent maintenance and conservation interventions works, in cooperation with "Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Frangaise de Jerusalem" and the French General Consulate in Jerusalem with joint funding from UNESCO regular programme and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The site was severely affected and damaged due to the heavy rain storms during the intense winter of 2014-2015 in addition to the neglect and lack of necessary regular maintenance. Several features of the site were subject to the gradual deterioration, looting and break-ins. The urgent intervention ensured better protection of the site's features, enhanced its usability and accessibility by visitors. The planned set of interventions included cleaning of the site from dirt and wild vegetation, consolidation and repair of structural features, repairing pathways maintaining them safe for visitors, installing protection canopies for mosaics and the pool of the Roman bath as well as providing security fence around the site. Moreover, a capacity-building and on-the-job training approach was continued though this emergency intervention by utilizing the expertise of previously trained workers and technicians who received training on stone masonry cutting and building. On-the-job training programme further developed the capacities of these workers on the techniques of archaeological sites' conservation.

13. UNESCO organized a capacity development workshop on techniques of cultural heritage conservation in Gaza. The workshop was implemented by RWAQ Centre for architectural conservation in cooperation with Iwan Center for Architectural Heritage in the Gaza strip. It focused on two essential components of conservation materials and techniques: lime mortars and limestone conservation. Thirty architects, engineers and contractors participated in the four-day specialized capacity development workshop. The aim was to enhance skills of technicians in the Gaza Strip in cultural heritage conservation to enable them to participate in the rehabilitation of historic buildings damaged during the 2014 conflict in Gaza, including the Alkhader historic building/shrine, which is planned to be rehabilitated by UNESCO in 2016 within the project "Local development through the Rehabilitation and revitalization of Historic Environment in Palestine" ([see document 199 EX/20](#)).

14. UNESCO rehabilitated the As-Saqqa mansion in the old city of Shujaiya, in cooperation with Iwan Center for Architectural Heritage. This remarkable Ottoman period mansion was damaged in 2014, during the conflict.

15. In the context of the 10th anniversary of UNESCO 2005 Convention concerning the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and in order to support the diversity of artistic expressions and creative industries, particularly the artists who have been affected during the last conflict in Gaza, UNESCO supported several art exhibitions: (i) On 9 September 2015, the longest mural painting in Gaza was produced by 64 young artists; (ii) From October 2015 to January 2016, in cooperation with the General Union for Cultural Centers and "Shababek, Windows for contemporary art", two exhibitions of young contemporary artists were organized in Gaza; and (iii) On the occasion of Universal Children's day and the 10th anniversary of 2005 Convention, a painting exhibition and auction entitled "With the Children of Gaza ... there is hope" was organized jointly with UNICEF. The proceeds were in support of children of Gaza.

Communication and Information

16. In Gaza, UNESCO supported the Press House, an independent, non-profit media institution, in the organization of a conference on "**Women and Female Journalists protection is the right of all**", held on 24 November 2015, as part of the *16 days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign*. About 120 attendants from several institutions involved in the defence of women's rights attended the conference, which reviewed the position of women in several laws, and provided an opportunity for women to share their own stories on different types of abuse and violence they had faced. The conference proposed a set of recommendations on the next

steps to be adopted by the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and the Government to train women, including journalists, on their rights and obligations. The conference was covered by main local media outlets. One video can be found here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EG69foNooZE>.

Youth (the NET-MED project)

17. Young journalists and media activists have participated in a training on Media and Information Literacy (November 2015), and have also been trained on the methodology of the media monitoring. These trainings have taken place in Ramallah, gathering eight members of media-sub group from Gaza with four of their partners in West Bank and it was the first attempt for NET-MED Youth to gather together Palestinian youth from both West Bank and Gaza.

18. NET-MED Youth members have been also actively engaged in the implementation of the #Unite4Heritage campaign in Gaza and in other youth advocacy initiatives. The youth in Gaza held four main activities for the campaign between October and December 2015 (See also document 199 EX/20). Youth has also taken part in promoting the campaign by taking photos, videos and blogging on the campaign's global hashtags in both Arabic and English.

Gender equality

19. UNESCO supported an in-depth research entitled "Women's and Men's Voices", focusing on the impact on gender relations of the July-August 2014 war in Gaza. This research contributes to UNESCO's overall activities to mainstream gender equality in Palestine, implemented through the Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Centre, with funding by the Government of Norway.

B. The two Palestinian sites of al-Haram al-Ibrahimi/Tomb of the Patriarchs in al-Khalil/Hebron and the BHAI ibn Rabat Mosque/Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem

20. This matter has been on the agenda of the Executive Board since its 184th session at the request of a number of Member States, in relation to the decision of the Israeli authorities, announced in February 2010, to include the two above-mentioned sites located in Hebron and Bethlehem in Israel's National Heritage Programme.

21. At its 197th session, the Executive Board adopted [197 EX/Decision 32](#) by which it reiterated that it "*disapproves the ongoing Israeli illegal excavations, works, construction of private roads for settlers and a separation wall inside the Old City of Al-Khalil/Hebron, that harmfully affect the integrity of the site, and the subsequent denial of freedom of movement and freedom of access to places of worship*", and urges Israel "*to end these violations in compliance with provisions of relevant UNESCO conventions, resolutions and decisions*".

22. The Executive Board also decided to discuss this matter at its 199th session and invited the Director-General to submit to it a progress report thereon. No information has reached the Secretariat on these matters to date.

23. Should additional information become available to the Secretariat regarding the above-mentioned matters, the Director-General is prepared to publish an addendum to this document before the 199th session of the Executive Board in order to inform the Members of the Executive Board of any new developments in that regard.

Proposed decision

24. The Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines: The Executive Board,

1. Having considered document 199 EX/19,
2. Recalling previous decisions concerning "Occupied Palestine",
3. Decides to include this item in the agenda of its 200th session, and invites the Director-General to submit to it a follow-up report thereon.