



Executive Board

Hundred and ninety-fifth session

195 EX/29

Paris, 25 August 2014
Original: English

Item 29 of the provisional agenda

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF GAZA: IMPLEMENTATION OF 194 EX/DECISION 28

SUMMARY

This document summarizes progress made by UNESCO since the 194th 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 in the present document.

1. This document presents an update on UNESCO assistance in the Gaza Strip during the period from January to mid-August 2014.
2. In July 2014, the humanitarian situation in Gaza severely deteriorated as a result of renewed conflict. At the time of writing this report, the education system has been heavily affected. At least, 230 schools and seven higher-education institutions in Gaza were reported damaged, including 25 schools entirely destroyed or severely damaged. At least seven UNRWA schools, serving as shelters for large civilian populations of internally displaced people (IDPs) have been damaged.
3. On 23 July and 4 August, the Director-General issued two public statements calling for the protection of education during conflict and urged all parties to keep schools out of the conflict, including from any sort of military use, stressing that schoolchildren and teachers, anywhere, should not live in the fear of attacks in schools. The Director-General also called for the protection of journalists and deplored the death of seven Palestinian journalists and of one foreign correspondent in the context of the current conflict.
4. As concerns the situation of cultural heritage, there was reported damage to a number of sites and monuments. At the time of the drafting of the present report, UNESCO has not been in a position to undertake an in-depth assessment of cultural heritage sites in Gaza given the prevailing circumstances on the ground. However, UNESCO's early assessment indicates no direct damage to the Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer in Nuseirat, which is inscribed on the World Heritage Tentative List of Palestine. As regards the archaeological site of the ancient harbour city of Anthedon, which is also on the World Heritage Tentative List of Palestine, damage has occurred; its nature and extent will need to be studied. UNESCO is in the process of collecting and making available comprehensive information on damage and needs in relation to Gaza's cultural heritage sites.
5. UNESCO plays an active part in the overall United Nations humanitarian response to the crisis. On 1 August, the United Nations launched the 2014 Gaza Crisis Appeal addressing urgent humanitarian needs. UNESCO's contribution to the Appeal concentrates on the protection of education. Building on extensive experience in the protection of education in Gaza, UNESCO will seek to improve the safety of the education environment and mitigate the distress affecting teachers and learners through psychosocial support, recreational activities and innovative classroom practices. During the temporary ceasefire, which started on 11 August, UNESCO together with local and international partners started identifying the most pressing needs of the education system. The assessment is part of the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA), which will determine priorities for humanitarian response in key areas such as protection, shelter, water and sanitation, health, as well as education. The Acting Head of the UNESCO Ramallah Office visited Gaza on 13 and 14 August to coordinate UNESCO participation in the IRA and consult with local stakeholders on response priorities.

EDUCATION

6. UNESCO continued its active participation in the humanitarian cluster system. It contributed to the development of the Education and Child Protection clusters' advocacy strategy and it supported the Education Cluster in the process of developing the 2014 Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC). UNESCO's contribution to the 2014 HPC focused on ensuring schools' ability to fulfil their crucial role as

protective spaces for children and communities in Gaza. As the humanitarian situation severely deteriorated in July 2014 and new emergency assistance became needed, UNESCO revised its intervention based on new needs resulting from the crisis; and ensured its integration into the Gaza Crisis Appeal, developed by the Humanitarian Country Team. The new intervention included in the Appeal aims at protecting education from attack, promoting schools as safe zones, mitigating the psycho-social impact of the crisis and providing inclusive quality education in affected secondary schools in Gaza. Finally, as mentioned above, in mid-August UNESCO engaged in the OCHA-led Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA) focusing on education needs, in particular with a view to prepare the beginning on time of the new Palestinian school year, which is scheduled to start later this month. The assessment will determine physical damage to schools and higher-education institutions and needs for psycho-social support of both learners and teachers. It also addresses immediate challenges of access to education and of availability of teachers and educational material, arising from the large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as of damaged education infrastructure.

7. In support of the EFA agenda in Palestine, and under the overall coordination of UNESCO, nine United Nations agencies (FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNRWA, UNSCO, WFP and WHO) and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education have developed and implemented the EFA Package during the past three years in collaboration with civil society organizations and universities. It focuses on inclusive and child-friendly education and early childhood development as key areas to guarantee the right to quality education for all Palestinian children regardless of gender, skills, disabilities, backgrounds and circumstances. It is piloted in Palestinian schools, including now a total of 26 schools in Gaza.

8. A major achievement of the EFA initiative was the opening and running of Grade-0 classrooms (one year of pre-school before Grade 1) in 2013, for the first time in Palestinian public schools. Fourteen Early Childhood Development Education (ECD) classrooms opened in Gaza, an important step in making ECD part of the formal education system. Since then, newly nominated Grade-0 teachers have been trained in all pilot schools in Gaza, as well as all Grade-1 teachers to ensure a smooth transition to primary education. Based on the successful pilot of the Grade-0 classrooms, the objective is now to gradually open more ECD classrooms over the next years.

9. Also in support of the EFA initiative, a project funded by the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) was launched in October 2013. This new phase of the Initiative, implemented by UNESCO in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and UNRWA, incorporates 11 additional pilot schools in Gaza, including six UNRWA schools, bringing the total to 26 pilot schools in Gaza. A group of 25 master trainers (special education counsellors), subject supervisors (Grades 1-4, representing all education districts in Gaza), university staff and representatives of Ministry and UNRWA central staff in Gaza reached capacity development in order to implement innovative education programmes through child-centred approaches and active teaching and learning techniques. Master trainers and supervisors trained 767 teachers, school principals, vice-principals, school counsellors and supervisors in Gaza schools on inclusive and child-friendly education as well as awareness-raising activities. In total, 1,148 parents and caregivers, as well as 670 students in Gaza benefited directly from awareness-raising activities.

10. With financial support from the Saudi Committee for the Relief of Palestinian People, UNESCO provided support to vulnerable students through a new programme which seeks to expand students' access to resources, materials and books through libraries, and to develop a right to education advocacy strategy. In June 2014, two community libraries had been identified and equipped in Gaza. The reference and text books were to be purchased in July and the libraries were to open during the summer; this process was delayed due to the ongoing crisis. Also, from December 2013 until May 2014, a training programme was conducted for librarians to provide technical advice on the establishment of libraries. Special attention was given to the accessibility of students with special needs. Twelve volunteer students from Gaza started receiving training on the administration of a community library and on advocacy strategy. A Right to Education Advocacy Package was finalized and will be the basis for each library to develop their action plans for an advocacy campaign. The overall campaign is placed under the umbrella of inclusive education, with a particular focus on access to quality education for students with special educational needs.

CULTURE

11. UNESCO continued its cooperation with the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Frangaise de Jerusalem, the Islamic University in Gaza and the French General Consulate in Jerusalem to safeguard the archaeological site of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer in Nuseirat, which is inscribed on the World Heritage Tentative List of Palestine. During the period from January to March 2014, two international expert missions were carried out to enhance local capacities on stonemasonry necessary for the emergency restoration works, especially those related to the consolidation of the west wall of the crypt. The two experts provided on-the-job trainings to five technicians and workers that had been previously trained, to twelve students in architecture and archaeology from the Islamic University of Gaza and to two technical staff from the Department of Antiquities of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The stone blocks produced during these trainings were used for the partial restitution of the western wall of the crypt. Other missions are required to complete the wall, which is necessary for maintaining the structure of the crypt and preventing further collapse. UNESCO continues its fundraising efforts with its partners as the lack of funds necessary to complete the emergency measures continues to raise concerns.

12. The project "Local Development through the rehabilitation and revitalization of the historic built environment in Palestine", funded by the Government of Sweden through SIDA, UNESCO and its implementing partner, the Centre for Architectural Conservation (Riwaq), successfully implemented the renovation of Dar As Saqqa in the old city of Gaza to host the Iwan Centre for cultural heritage. The building will have several functions: an office, a hall and an activity centre for the Al-Qattan child centre in Gaza. The project provided on-site training for architecture students at the Islamic University in Gaza.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

13. In June 2014, UNESCO completed the freedom-of-expression project supported by Finland, "Strengthening the safety and protection of journalists and the press freedom in the Gaza Strip". All of UNESCO's activities in the field of communication and information in Palestine have sought to address the specific challenges faced by journalists in Gaza, in light of the environment in which they operate. Document 195 EX/28 ("Implementation of 37 C/Resolution 67 and 194 EX/Decision 27 concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories" reports in detail on activities in the field of communication and information benefitting Palestine.

CONCLUSION

14. UNESCO has actively engaged in the response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza within its fields of competence, as well as in funds mobilization efforts. The support of UNESCO Member States and donors will be essential for the Organization to be able to address priorities identified and provide adequate assistance. The Director-General welcomes the agreement of all parties to extend the ceasefire, reached at the time of the drafting of the present report; as it is crucial for the timely delivery of assistance to pressing needs, as well as for planning for recovery and rehabilitation. In the light of the rapidly evolving situation on the ground, the Director-General intends to issue an addendum to the present document, in advance of the 195th session of the Executive Board in order to keep Member States abreast of latest developments in relation to UNESCO's response to the Gaza Crisis.

