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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Twenty-eighth session

Suzhou, China
28 June – 7 July 2004

Item 17B.II of the Provisional Agenda: Protection of Palestinian Cultural and Natural Heritage

SUMMARY

This document provides a summary of the progress made in the implementation of the activities related to decisions 26 COM 6.1 and 26 COM 6.2, taken by the Committee at its 26th session in Budapest. It also contains some information on the main objectives agreed between the Secretariat and the Palestinian Authority for the use of the additional amount of 100,000 USD, allocated by the Committee at its 27th session in July 2003 to provide technical cooperation in favour of the Palestinian natural and cultural heritage.

Draft Decision 28 COM 17B.II : see paragraph 4.

Having recognized its outstanding universal value, at its 26th session in Budapest (June 2002), the World Heritage Committee approved an amount of 150,000 USD in support of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage. In particular, the Committee requested the Secretariat to assist the Palestinian Authority in:

1. Establishing an inventory of such outstanding cultural and natural heritage
2. Evaluating its state of conservation and the measures for its safeguarding
3. Building a capacity within the Palestinian responsible institutions in view of the future implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*

The Committee, moreover, requested the Director-General of UNESCO to seek additional funding to complement and strengthen the above-mentioned activities, and to report on the progress in their implementation at its next session.

In pursuance of the decision by the Committee, and in close consultation with the responsible Palestinian authorities and ICCROM, the Centre prepared a work-plan including 7 activities. Their implementation, initially slowed down by the volatile situation in the Region (including the war in Iraq), has now made considerable progress, thanks in particular to the full time implication of the UNESCO Office in Ramallah. The main achievements have been as follows:

1. Inventory of outstanding cultural and natural heritage

An Inventory of Palestinian cultural and natural sites of potential outstanding universal value has been prepared. This Inventory, which contains 20 properties (16 cultural, 3 natural and one mixed), has been the result of a wide consultative process involving dozens of Palestinian specialists and various concerned institutions, and notably the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, through a series of Consultative and Awareness-Raising Workshops. It is important to mention that these consultations took place among all the concerned parties, including from Gaza, despite the extreme difficulties posed by the current situation to logistics and movement of people. The draft Inventory, reviewed by an international expert, has been finalized and is currently under publication in a small brochure. At the time of the preparation of this report, the Centre does not know whether this brochure will be ready for distribution to the members of the Committee at its 28th session in Suzhou. The completion of this Inventory of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding universal value, and the collection of the relative documentation, constitute a first and very important step towards the development of awareness and conservation policies inspired by the principles and standards of the *World Heritage Convention*.

2. State of conservation and measures for safeguarding the Palestinian heritage

Concerning the assessment of the state of conservation and identification of required safeguarding measures for selected heritage sites, contracts were established with international experts to conduct monitoring missions to some of the main sites of the Palestinian Territories. A mission has already taken place for the Isham Palace (Jericho). Further missions are foreseen in May 2004 to the sites of Bethlehem, Nablus and the archaeological site of Tell Rumeida (near Hebron), as requested by the Committee at its 27th session by decision 27 COM 5.2. The above-mentioned sites (except Tell Rumeida) were also visited by the Programme Specialist for Culture at the UNESCO Office of Ramallah.

Regarding Nablus, in particular, UNESCO has received in January alarming reports and several appeals concerning the damages occurred to parts of the historic urban fabric (and notably at the Abdel Hadi Palace) as a result of armed conflict. The Director-General of UNESCO requested therefore the Centre to carry out an assessment mission. Reports on all these sites will be prepared and their findings brought to the attention of the Committee at the earliest possible opportunity.

3. Development of a capacity within the Palestinian responsible institutions in view of the future implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*

An essential activity carried out in preparation for all the others, has been the organization of a Training Workshop on the Implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*, which took place at ICCROM in Rome from 8 to 13 September 2003. 16 Palestinian specialists in cultural and natural heritage gained familiarity with the terminology and procedures of the Convention, including preparing Tentative Lists, the format of a Nomination File and the criteria for WH listing. In addition, an action plan for the implementation of the principles of the Convention was drawn up, and served as a basis for discussions among the participants and their institutions upon their return to the Palestinian Territories. The workshop, which has been greatly appreciated by the participants, included site visits and practical exercises. In addition to this Training Workshop, a Palestinian World Heritage Committee has been established, to serve as a coordinating and consultative body for all matters related to World Heritage, in view of the hoped-for ratification of the Convention by a future Palestinian State. This Unit, which is in charge of the coordination of all WH related activities in the Palestinian Territories, is currently based at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage. In order to enable the Unit to work and meet, a series of activities were organized to strengthen the coordination between the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, including its local offices, and the various institutions part of the Palestinian World Heritage Committee. These include the provision of training, equipment and other information material such data-base, web page and internet connection. The implementation of this activity is still on going.

Finally, a second Training Workshop, specifically focussed on the process of the nomination of a property for inscription on the World Heritage List, is foreseen for July 2004 in Bethlehem, in collaboration with ICCROM.

With regard to decision 26 COM 6.2, which requested the Secretariat to identify additional resources to further strengthen its action in favour of the protection of the Palestinian heritage, it is important to mention that, thanks to a contribution of Italy through its Trust Fund with the Centre, it has been possible in 2003 and 2004 to support the participation of Palestinian experts in the main events related to World Heritage, including in the sessions of the World Heritage Committee. Additional resources were provided by the Italian Government to support a training course on site management and strategic planning, still to be implemented.

4. Follow up

At its 27th session, the Committee approved a further amount of 100,000 USD, under the budget for 2004-2005, to ensure the follow up to the above-mentioned activities. The Centre, in close coordination with the UNESCO Office in Ramallah, is finalizing a corresponding work-plan, which will include additional resources for awareness-raising, and institutional and capacity building, with particular emphasis on site management. One special project within this new package will focus on the identification and conservation of a cultural landscape, among those selected within the Inventory.

Draft decision: 28 COM 17 B.II

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Takes note of the information provided by the Secretariat on the progress made in the implementation of its decisions 26 COM 6.1 and 26 COM 6.2;*
2. *Commends the Palestinian Authority and the Secretariat for the activities accomplished despite the difficult circumstances;*
3. *Requests the Centre to continue assisting the concerned Palestinian institutions in developing capacity in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage and assessing its state of conservation, through the allocation of 100,000 USD approved by the Committee at its 27th session in 2003 and present a report on the progress made for the consideration of the Committee at its 29th session in June/July 2005.*