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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD  
CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Twenty-ninth Session

Durban, South Africa  
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**Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda: Periodic Reports**

**11D. Progress report on the protection of the 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**, **26 COM 6.2** and **26 COM 24.2**, taken by the Committee at its 26th session in Budapest, as well as those related to the use of the additional amount of USD 100,000, allocated by the Committee at its 27th session in July 2003 to provide technical cooperation in favour of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage, confirmed by Decision **28 COM 17 B.II**. It also provides information on the state of conservation of Palestinian heritage requested by the Committee's decisions **27 COM 5.2** and **28 COM 17B.II**.

**Draft Decision:** *29 COM 11D*, see Point V.

## **Introduction**

1. Having recognized the outstanding value of the Palestinian heritage, the World Heritage Committee approved, at its 26th session (Budapest, 2002), the allocation of an amount of USD 150,000, and requested the UNESCO Secretariat to assist the Palestinian Authority in establishing an inventory of such outstanding cultural and natural heritage, evaluating its state of conservation and the measures for its safeguarding, and building a capacity within the Palestinian responsible institutions in view of the future implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*.
2. A first work plan, although slowed down by the volatile situation in the Region (including the war in Iraq) was implemented by the UNESCO Office in Ramallah, in close consultation with the responsible Palestinian authorities. Thanks to the continuous support of the World Heritage Committee and, notably the allocation of an additional amount of USD 100,000 for the 2004-2005 biennium, as well as a USD 40,000 contribution through the “Joint Declaration on Cooperation concerning Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection between the Italian Government and UNESCO”, an up-dated work plan was elaborated, in line with the “*UNESCO Programme of Assistance for Rehabilitation and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (2004-2007)*” adopted at the Sixth Joint UNESCO/Palestinian Authority Committee Meeting (July 2004). The activities foreseen therein are the following:
  - a) World Heritage awareness raising initiatives (publication and distribution of information material, consultative workshops);
  - b) Reinforcement of the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat (staff training, related web page upgrading and management, collection of resource materials, equipment);
  - c) Institutional capacity building and sharing of knowledge (training courses on information management, site management and risk preparedness);
  - d) Assistance for the compilation of preliminary potential Nomination Files for the Old City of Bethlehem and the site of Tell es-Sultan in Jericho;
  - e) A special project focused on the identification and conservation of cultural landscapes in accordance with the Inventory (site No. 7: the Land of Olives and Vines).

## **I. Inventory**

3. Since the last report presented in Suzhou, July 2004, the “*Inventory of Palestinian cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding universal value*” has been reviewed, notably through a joint mission of an international expert in Cultural Heritage and a UNESCO World Heritage Centre Programme Specialist for Natural Heritage, in November-December 2004. It is expected that the Palestinian responsible authorities will publish this *Inventory* in view of its presentation during the 29th Session of the World Heritage Committee.

4. The *Inventory*, which contains 20 properties (17 cultural, 3 natural), 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, concluded in December 2004. Consultations took place among all the concerned parties, including from Gaza, despite the difficulties posed by the current situation in terms of logistics and movement of people. The completion of this *Inventory of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding universal value* constitutes 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*.

## **II. Establishment of the Palestinian World Heritage Committee**

5. The Palestinian World Heritage Committee, and its Secretariat, has been officially set up: 11 members, from specialized bodies, both public and private institutions, were nominated by the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities in April 2005. The Secretariat, which works under the supervision of the Committee, is coordinated by the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, and is responsible for the implementation of the activities, in cooperation with the UNESCO Office in Ramallah.
6. Provision of equipment and other information technology materials and services, i.e. the design of a data-base for cultural sites, the design of a web page and the supply of internet connection for 12 months have been ensured by UNESCO to enhance the Secretariat's efficiency.
7. A small resource centre, temporarily hosted by the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, was also set up by the purchasing of specialized books and journals. This library will be enriched by using additional funds and moved to the premises of the Ramallah Archaeological Museum.
8. In 2004, through the Italian contribution, it was possible to support the participation of Palestinian experts in the main events related to World Heritage, including in the 28th Session of the World Heritage Committee (Suzhou, 2004).

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

9. Further to the Training Workshop on the Implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*, which took place at ICCROM in Rome from 8 to 13 September 2003, and attended by 16 Palestinian specialists in cultural and natural heritage, a second Training Workshop, specifically focussed on the methodology and process of the nomination of a property for inscription on the World Heritage List, including management planning, took place in July 2004 in Bethlehem, in collaboration with ICCROM. The course was attended by 20 Palestinian specialists, and provided an important contribution to the development of the capacities in the Palestinian Territories.

10. In the framework of the reinforcement of the local institutions a programme of computer literacy was carried out for more than 30 officials from the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, including training in Geographic Information Systems (2004-2005 contribution).
11. In February 2005, the UNESCO Office in Ramallah, in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage and the Department of Historical, Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", organized an International Training Workshop entitled "*Tell es-Sultan in the context of the Jordan Valley: site management, conservation and sustainable development*". The one-week workshop, mainly funded by the Italian Government, focused on site management and strategic planning, using the archaeological site of the Ancient Jericho (ranked number 2 in the *Inventory*) as a case-study. More than 30 speakers intervened from six different countries and about 60 participants attended the workshop. An information meeting for potential donors concluded the event, while an International Task Force coordinated by UNESCO and the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, established for the follow-up of the recommendations of the meeting, is currently working on the preparation of the outline of the management plan and the formulation of a project document to be submitted to the donor community.

#### **IV. State of conservation and measures for safeguarding the Palestinian heritage**

12. Concerning the assessment of the state of conservation and identification of required safeguarding measures for selected heritage sites, the UNESCO Office in Ramallah organized a number of monitoring missions to some of the main sites in the Palestinian Territories. Missions to Jericho (December 2003), Bethlehem, Nablus and Hebron (May 2004) were undertaken by three international experts, accompanied by the Programme Specialist for Culture at the Ramallah Office.
13. In addition, further to repeated appeals to UNESCO concerning the damage to parts of the historic urban fabric of Nablus as a result of armed conflict and in compliance with decision **27 COM 5.2** related to the archaeological site of Tell Rumeida (near Hebron), a special mission was organized in May 2004 (with the support of the Italian Fund) to assess the state of conservation of these two sites. The international expert who carried out the mission did not have access to the site of Tell Rumeida. However, after negotiation with the Israeli authorities, the Programme Specialist for Culture at the UNESCO Office in Ramallah was able to visit the site on 14 June 2004 in order to assess its state of conservation. A summary of these reports is presented hereafter.

##### **A. Nablus**

14. According to the reports mentioned above, the cultural heritage of the Old City of Nablus has suffered extensive losses, first in April 2002, further to military operations: hundreds of buildings were affected, while sixty-four were severely damaged, seventeen of which had been considered of particular heritage significance through an inventory prepared by the Graz University in 1997-2002. Four buildings were completely ruined, and their sites turned into heaps of rubble or cleared away, creating open and dusty scars in the historic urban fabric.

15. Following these events, the reconstruction cost for the Old City was estimated, with the support of UNDP, to tens of millions of US dollars. The exact extent of the damage, however, is difficult to assess as the inflation rate is high and restoration work on historic buildings cannot easily be evaluated. Moreover, the loss of irreplaceable heritage value cannot be determined financially. Figures pertaining to the actual spending have not been obtained from the Municipality.
16. Another military operation from 15 December 2003 to 6 January 2004 brought further damage, especially in the Qarioun District of the Old City, resulting in the complete destruction of three residential houses, while another thirty-five buildings were rendered inhabitable. The Abdel-Hadi Palace was also hit by mortars and affected by explosions.
17. The Municipality of Nablus has been engaged in a large rehabilitation programme, to which the Governments of Norway and Japan contributed over four million dollars. The European Union and UNESCO have provided further assistance. According to one of the reports, it appears that the rehabilitation – or rather the repair - works are being carried out in haste with the aim of responding to the immediate humanitarian needs of the population, with little consideration for the heritage values of the historic urban fabric. Modern technologies and materials seem to have been used extensively and recent unauthorized additions constructed together with copies of ancient traditional fabric, thus further compromising the authenticity of the Old City.
18. It is important to stress that, even before the events of 2002, the state of conservation of the historic fabric within the Old City of Nablus suffered from the lack of an appropriate conservation policy and planning. Both technical reports highlighted the need to develop the legal, regulatory and institutional system for the conservation of the Old City, and recommendations were provided in this regard.

## **B. Hebron/Al Khalil**

19. The situation in Hebron (Al Khalil, in Arabic) is very different from that of Nablus. Hebron is a typical Palestinian small town built over the centuries around the sanctuary of Abraham (Mosque of Ibrahim for the Muslims and Tomb of the Patriarchs for the Jews). Hebron does not host outstanding palaces and monuments, but rather a coherent traditional vernacular architecture. A large section of the historic fabric was demolished during the Jordanian rule (before 1967) in order to create a wide open space around the Sanctuary.
20. According to the *“Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip”* (1995), and related documents (*“Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron”*, 1997), the area of Hebron is subject to a double regime of authority dividing the city into zone ‘H1’, under full Palestinian sovereignty (the larger one, with some 140,000 inhabitants), and zone ‘H2’ where only civil powers and responsibilities have been transferred to the Palestinian side while remaining under Israeli military control. The Old City, the Sanctuary and Tell Rumeida are included in this ‘H2’ zone.
21. The historical core of Hebron, which was inhabited by approximately 10,000 people in 1952, was almost deserted in 1996 (400 inhabitants only). The Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, a well-structured and efficient body, was therefore created by the Palestinian Authority to help the return of the Hebronite people back to the Old City. When the Committee started the rehabilitation process, most of the houses were empty

and deteriorated by the lack of maintenance, but still standing. Since 1996, more than 500 buildings (800 apartments) were rehabilitated, together with the repair of all public infrastructures, including sewerage, street pavement and even a fire extinguishing system. The result is very impressive, owing also to the attention paid in the intervention at integrating the urban and architectural scales. Buildings have been rehabilitated and improved by adding all necessary modern facilities (toilets, kitchens and bathrooms), respecting as much as possible the traditional techniques and spatial typologies. The rehabilitated buildings are never isolated but part of a group of buildings corresponding, most of the time, to a *hosh* or an urban neighbourhood. As a result, around 4,000 Palestinian people returned to inhabit the historic centre of Hebron, while approximately 300 to 500 Israeli settlers also live in the area.

22. Twelve millions US dollars have been spent to date for these works, mostly coming from external donors. A Conservation Master Plan is being developed, with help from the Swedish Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the expertise of the Palestinian NGO Riwaq.
23. A decree was issued in 2002 by the Israeli Military Command for the opening of a large road through the Old City of Hebron in order to connect the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba (ca. 6,000 inhabitants on the outskirts of Hebron) to the Tomb of the Patriarchs (the Mosque of Ibrahim), thereby destroying a number of buildings. At the time of the issuing of this Military Decree, the Deputy-Director General of UNESCO was on mission to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Informed of the situation and urged to take action by the Palestinian authorities, he expressed to the Israeli authorities UNESCO's deep concern for the safeguarding of these buildings, which constitute an integral part of the historic urban centre of Hebron.
24. Further to the intervention by UNESCO, and as a result of complaints and appeals, including from the European Parliament and ICOMOS Israel, the Supreme Court of Israel decided, in February 2003, to rule against the demolition of the 22 houses dating back to the Mamluk-Ottoman period. Unfortunately, in August 2004, the Israeli military authorities proceeded with the destruction of some buildings within historic Hebron. According to a statement issued by ICOMOS Palestine, three of the original 22 buildings considered for demolition were destroyed and eleven others damaged in the process. The Palestinian community fears that unless urgent action is taken by the International Community, the destructions might continue, leading to the opening of the mentioned connecting road.

### **C. Tell Rumeida**

25. On 14 June 2004, and in compliance with Decision **27 COM 5.2**, a short inspection was carried out to the archaeological site of Tell Rumeida, near Hebron (the site, as the Old City, is included in area 'H2'), by the Programme Specialist for Culture at the UNESCO Office in Ramallah. The mission was accompanied by the Archaeological Staff Officer of Judea and Samaria (Israeli Civil Administration), and escorted by IDF (Israeli Defence Forces).
26. It is important to recall that Tell Rumeida is an archaeological site on the top of a hill facing the present town of Hebron, which was first excavated in the 1960s, then in the 1980s and lastly in 1999. The excavated site is only a small fraction of the potential archaeological area, which extends over the entire hill (i.e. the acropolis of the

settlement, identified as the ancient Hebron). According to biblical narrative, the *tell* corresponds to King David's first capital. Archaeological surveys and excavations indicate a continuous occupation from the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3000 BC) to the Byzantine period.

27. Until the end of the Ottoman rule, Tell Rumeida had preserved its integrity, as a rural area of olives and vines (magnificent monumental trees still characterize the rural landscape of the hill). Only in recent times, starting during the British Mandate (1918-1948), did the building development of the land take place. Today, about 12 to 20 houses, belonging to Palestinians, stand today on the location, which supposedly coincides with the ancient citadel. The exact age of these buildings is difficult to assess, but they probably date back to the period 1930-1967. In the same period, gravel roads were opened to link the houses with the fields and the city. An aerial photograph of the whole property *sine data*, but probably taken a few years before 1967, shows the presence of several houses in the area, the pattern of the roads as well as the cultivated fields punctuated by the olive trees.
28. Further to the second excavation campaign carried out by the University of Tel Aviv (Dr. Avi Ofer, 1984-86), the site attracted the interest of the Jewish community, as the ancient seat of King David's first capital city, and a group of settlers established mobile homes on the top of the archaeological site. From 1984 to the present day, the site has been the subject of continuous disputes between the settlers, who tended to make permanent their occupation of the land, and the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, which requested their removal, supported by Israeli archaeologists. The issue was brought to the attention of the Israeli High Court, which ruled initially (2001) against the construction of new buildings over the archaeological areas. Despite this decision, the construction of a building on top of the ancient remains was somehow authorized and, since December 2002, works have resumed. A detailed chronology of events related to the period 1984-2002 was produced by the Palestinian Authority (reported in "Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Palestinian National Authority, *Tell er-Rumeide (Ancient Hebron). Illegal Construction on Top of the Archaeological Site*", February 2003).
29. The visit inspected two areas: the archaeological site excavated and partially occupied by a new building and the surrounding area of the *tell*.
30. The first area is a very small portion (48 x 12 m) of what presumably was the ancient city. According to the archaeologists, this part displays evidence of Early and Middle Bronze Age (external city walls and gate, preceded by a stone-paved staircase-road access) and several layers dating back to Iron Age - King David's time - and Byzantine period (rooms with pillars, wine-making area, and a mosaic). The Bronze Age area is not covered by new structures, but bounded by a concrete wall on the north side and a road to the south. The area of the Iron Age and Byzantine remains is now covered by a 4-storey residential structure of approximately 30 x 11 m in plan. It is built on a series of reinforced concrete pillars, founded on the archaeological site itself. The idea is to preserve and display the archaeological findings under the new building, as a semi-open museum. Despite the precautions taken during the construction (such as ensuring ventilation and the use of special geo-textile materials to protect the ancient structures), the result is far from satisfactory. The building was officially inaugurated in April 2005.

31. Concerning the rest of the *tell* (circa 7-8 Ha.), there are a number of factors affecting its cultural and environmental values. The growing urban encroachment is probably the major threat to the integrity of the area. Several Palestinian houses, mainly composed of 2 floors, are located in the vicinity of the excavated site, and generally scattered over the hill. As mentioned above, the establishment of the majority of these houses dates back to the period prior to 1967, but the risk of a new wave of housing should not be underestimated.
32. The encroachment is accompanied by the construction of new infrastructure: the urbanization of the area brings necessarily tarred roads, sewerage, water supply, vehicular traffic, different types of wiring, etc. The digging for the set up of the infrastructure represents a considerable threat to the potential, and still unexplored, archaeological heritage. Opposite to the excavated site stands an Israeli military camp, which has not been visited. It is made of barracks and other removable structures. Moving around the hill, a progressive state of abandon is visible everywhere, with sparse garbage dumps and abandoned construction materials.
33. The land use plan elaborated under the “Revitalization of Hebron Old Town Project” in 2001 had foreseen the development of an archaeological park at Tell Rumeida, thus allowing the preservation and enhancement of the area. The site possesses great potential, should scientific excavations be carried out and an appropriate policy implemented as regards land use and building regulations.

## V. Draft Decision

### Draft Decision : 29 COM 11D

*The World Heritage Committee,*

1. *Having examined Document WHC-05/29.COM/11D,*
2. *Recalling Decision 28 COM 17 B.II taken at its 28th session (Suzhou, 2004),*
3. *Takes note of the information provided by the Secretariat on the progress made in the implementation of its decisions 27 COM 5.2 and 28 COM 17 B.II;*
4. *Commends the Palestinian Authority and the Secretariat for the activities carried out for the protection of the cultural heritage despite the difficult circumstances;*
5. *Regrets the damage inflicted to the cultural heritage of Nablus and Hebron as well as the new building constructed above the archaeological remains of Tell Rumeida;*
6. *Requests the State Party concerned to take appropriate measures to prevent and avoid any further destruction or irreversible damage to the Palestinian cultural heritage;*
7. *Requests the World Heritage Centre to take all necessary measures with the concerned parties to preserve those sites;*
8. *Requests the World Heritage Centre to continue assisting the concerned Palestinian institutions in developing capacity in the protection, preservation and management of*

*the cultural and natural heritage, and to present a report on the progress made for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 30th session in 2006;*

9. *Invites the States Parties to contribute to the implementation of the above activities and decides to allocate an amount of USD 100,000 to this end during the 2006-2007 biennium.*