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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD  
CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Thirtieth Session

Vilnius, Lithuania  
8-16 July 2006

**Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda: Periodic Reports**

**11C.2 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 taken by the Committee since its 26th session in Budapest (2002) to provide technical cooperation in favour of the protection of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage. It also provides information on the state of conservation of Palestinian heritage and preservation measures as requested by the Committee's decisions **28 COM 17 B.II** and **29 COM 11.D**

**Draft Decision : 30 COM 11C. 2 (see point 5)**

In June 2002, at its 26th session in Budapest, the World Heritage Committee recognized the outstanding value of the Palestinian heritage, and requested the 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, as well as building capacities within the Palestinian responsible institutions in view of the future implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*. A total amount of 250,000 USD was allocated by the Committee at its 26th and 27th sessions, confirmed by decision **28 COM 17 B.II**, while another 100,000 USD were granted for the period 2006-2007 by decision **29 COM 11D**.

The activities are 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, an updated 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) and reviewed at the Seventh Joint Committee in June 2005. The activities foreseen therein are the following:

- World Heritage awareness raising initiatives (publication and distribution of information material, consultative workshops);
- Reinforcement of the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat (staff training, related web page upgrading and management, collection of resource materials, equipment);
- Institutional capacity building and sharing of knowledge (training courses on information management, site management and risk preparedness);
- A special project focused on the identification and conservation of cultural landscapes in accordance with the Inventory (site No. 8: the Land of Olives and Vines).

## **1. Inventory**

The *Inventory of Palestinian cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding universal value* was presented at the 29th session of the Committee. It contains 20 properties (17 cultural, 3 natural), and 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*. It was presented officially in Bethlehem on 14 March 2006, during an information meeting jointly organized by UNESCO and the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, targeting mainly the donor community and civil society. Assessed as one of the best inventories of its kind, it might be used as a model for other countries in the Arab Region.

An Arabic translation of the 56-page *Inventory* illustrating 20 sites in the West Bank and Gaza was published recently by the Arab League Education, Culture and Science Organization (ALECSO) in 2000 copies for awareness purposes.

## **2. Reinforcement of the Palestinian World Heritage Committee**

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. Its Secretariat 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.

Provision of equipment and other information technology materials and services have been ensured as well as the creation of a small resource centre, temporarily hosted by the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage. The library which will be enriched by additional funding will be moved to the premises of the Ramallah Archaeological Museum - a traditional building in the old quarter of the city - which has been renovated and refurbished with the assistance of UNESCO. Specific equipment and various cultural heritage resource materials have been purchased from local and international institutions, such as ICCROM and the Getty Conservation Institute, to reinforce this Cultural Heritage Resource Centre.

In 2005, the World Heritage Fund supported the participation of Palestinian experts, both in the fields of cultural and natural heritage, in the main events related to World Heritage, including the 29th Session of the World Heritage Committee and the regional consultation meeting for the follow-up of Periodic Reporting in the Arab States which took place in Abu Dhabi in December 2005.

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

Following the International Training Workshop entitled *Tell es-Sultan in the context of the Jordan Valley: site management, conservation and sustainable development* which took place in February 2005 in Jericho, organized by the UNESCO Ramallah Office and the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, the University of Rome "La Sapienza" has just published its proceedings. Work is currently progressing on the preparation of the outline of the management plan and a project document was submitted to potential donors.

In the framework of the reinforcement of the capacities of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, a *Site Management and Risk Preparedness Training Course* has been completed after four months of theoretical and practical modules. The course, carried out using both Arabic and English languages, was attended by 15 mid-managers of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, coming from seven offices located in respective Governorates of the Palestinian Territories, including the Gaza Strip (connected through videoconference with Ramallah). The overall objective of the course was to initiate a practical and interactive approach to ensure an integrated management of archaeological sites and historic towns in the West Bank and Gaza by providing participants with relevant skills, tools and practical training. The latter was articulated in four modules with interactive sessions to discuss and evaluate work assignments given in between modules. The training (27 February - 27 June 2006) was facilitated by a local consultant who gathered several experts in the field of cultural heritage to give lectures and participate in the debate.

Within the *Cultural Landscape Project* launched in late 2005, a preliminary assessment of the current situation of cultural and natural landscape in the West Bank, especially relating to the condition of terraced olive groves, has been concluded with the technical assistance of an international consultant who carried out a mission from 13 to 21 January 2006. The project aims at providing the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage with safeguarding tools (*Guidelines for the protection and management of the Cultural Landscapes of Palestine*), in order to pave the ground for a real protection of this endangered ecosystem. A leaflet for awareness purposes and a technical report including recommendations were produced in this regard.

#### **4. Protection and safeguarding activities**

Owing to the current political situation, the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage lacks a comprehensive systematic management and conservation mechanism. In addition, the implementation of activities is made difficult as regards the circulation of expertise and materials in the hinterland.

As regards the assessment of the state of conservation and the identification of required safeguarding measures for heritage sites, the UNESCO Office in Ramallah ensures regular monitoring of sites, as much as the situation permits, and carries out several conservation-related activities, in close coordination with the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage. It is to be noted that the financial allocation from the World Heritage Fund, decided by the Committee at its previous sessions, is supplemented by the funding provided to the Palestinian heritage by UNESCO through its regular programme budget as well as by extra-budgetary funding from various sources.

##### **4.1. Nablus**

a) As mentioned in the report presented to the 29th session of the Committee, 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, notably through the project for the *Restoration and adaptive reuse of the Khan al-Wakala*, an ancient building in the Old City (budget: 180,000 USD). Despite the various difficulties and constraints encountered during the implementation of the work, the overall evaluation of the project is very positive.

b) In the framework of the project for the *Revitalization Plan for the Old City of Nablus*, a revised project has been approved by a private donor in December 2005, for an amount of 100,000 USD, taking into consideration the changed conditions of the town. The first component of the project consists of a National Open Design Competition for ‘Architects under 40’ and ‘Students in Architecture and Urban Planning’, which was launched on 15 May 2006. The architectural competition seeks proposals concerning the rehabilitation of six public spaces within two areas of the old fabric of Nablus by providing them with urban facilities such as children playgrounds, public gardens, squares and parking spaces. The second and major component of the project consists of implementing the winning proposals, after appropriate negotiations and in cooperation with the Municipality of Nablus. An awareness-raising campaign will complement this initiative.

c) Within the project of establishing an Action Plan for the preservation of Palestinian cultural heritage, the elaboration of a comprehensive Conservation plan for the Old City of Nablus is one of the priorities. Among the various institutions and organizations who have been studying the city, the International Forum of Historic Cities and the Technical University of Graz (Austria) have undertaken during the years 1999-2000 an inventory of historic buildings, computerized maps, by-laws on conservation, and a plan for the preservation and adaptation of the Old City. This considerable work could serve as the basis for the elaboration of such a Conservation Master plan.

#### **4.2. Hebron/Al Khalil**

Since the establishment of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) - a well-structured and efficient body created by the Palestinian Authority in 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. Twelve millions USD have been spent to date for these works, mostly coming from external donors. The basis for the elaboration of a Conservation Master Plan was the development by the HRC, with help from the Swedish Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the expertise of the Palestinian NGO Riwaq. This work needs to be completed and UNESCO is fund-raising to this end.

#### **4.3. Bethlehem**

To contribute to retaining the significance of the Palestinian cultural heritage by defining a coherent preservation strategy, adequate to the local context, and responding to the needs of its inhabitants, the project for the *Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management Plan* was finally endorsed by its donor, the Government of Italy (Budget: 500,000 USD). The project adopts a holistic approach to the management and development of Bethlehem and its surroundings, including the towns of Beit Sahour and Beit Jala which feature important cultural landmarks such as the Church of the Nativity and the Shepherds' Fields. The project will be implemented by the Palestinian Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation-Bethlehem, in agreement with the three Municipalities concerned.

#### **4.4. Jericho**

As part of the transfer of knowledge and technical know-how in the field of cultural heritage protection, upon request of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, some of the allocation from the World Heritage Fund was disbursed for the provision of technical assistance for the *Concept design of the protective shelters of the mosaic area of the Great Bath Hall of Qasr Hisham in Jericho*, a site included in the above-mentioned *Inventory*. An innovative approach was explored to ensure the participative approach highly recommended by the Palestinian institutions and stakeholders: an architectural competition for the design of the shelters was organised and carried out in January 2006, aiming at selecting a local practice to design the shelters, in cooperation with an international consultant, and to supervise the construction works. Professor Peter Zumthor (Switzerland), a world-renowned architect, accepted to chair the international jury that met on 4 February 2006. A joint-venture between the studio of Prof. Zumthor and the winning practice (from Ramallah) was established with a view to guaranteeing a sharing of the objectives and activities, as well as the obligation of achieving the desired results. Two missions from Switzerland have been already fielded in February and April 2006.

#### **4.5. Other activities**

a) In the framework of the technical assistance for the formulation of the flagship project on the *Cultural Itinerary: Jesus Christ Route*, which was renamed as *Developing Cultural Routes in Palestine: in the footsteps of the Prophets*, (agreed upon during the Seventh UNESCO/Palestinian Authority Committee Meeting held in Paris in September 2005), a mission was carried out in early February 2006 by the consultant involved since July 2005 in the drafting of the project document. Additional research and data-gathering on the itinerary was carried out and follow-up actions were taken by the UNESCO Office in Ramallah in

coordination with the Project Task Force led by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) in order to finalize the itinerary and relevant maps. It was decided to develop a general framework for sustainable tourism (cultural and natural itineraries) and identify the two segments of the itinerary, tentatively a) Bethlehem-Jericho via the Wilderness with Monasteries (El-Bariyah), targeting international tourists and, b) Burqin-Nablus via Sebastia, mainly addressing domestic tourism. The various localities along the route are included in the *Inventory*. The project which aims at involving public and private sectors, has a great potential for socio-economic development since it focuses on a tailor-made rehabilitation programme for selected heritage sites including institutional capacity-building, on-the-job training, restoration works, social and economic activities, as well as the protection of the Palestinian landscape at large.

b) The Swiss authorities have launched an assistance programme for the Gaza Strip, under the auspices of UNESCO. Originally focused on archaeological remains and the establishment of an archaeological museum, it is now also foreseeing the establishment of an urban plan in the northern coastal area as well as the training of the staff of the Department of Antiquities and of Cultural Heritage in the fields of conservation and museology.

c) A mission of the World Heritage Centre was carried out from 13 to 18 March 2006 to participate in World Heritage related events, i.e. the presentation of the *Inventory* mentioned above, as well as meetings with relevant counterparts, donor representatives in Jerusalem, due to the rescheduling of site visits in accordance with security measures following the Jericho incidents of 14 March 2006. In light of the above, the mission objectives were partially unattended especially regarding the formulation and implementation modalities of the World Heritage Action Plan to be discussed with the Palestinian stakeholders. To this end, a second mission will be organized in the fall of 2006.

## **5. Draft decision: 30 COM 11C. 2**

*The World Heritage Committee,*

1. *Having examined Document WHC-06/30.COM/11C.2,*
2. *Recalling Decision 29 COM 11D adopted at its 29th session (Durban, 2005),*
3. *Takes note of the information provided by the World Heritage Centre on the progress made in the implementation of its Decisions 28 COM 17 B.II and 29 COM 11.D, and commends the efforts of all professionals involved in preserving the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage;*
4. *Regrets that the prevailing situation, besides heavily affecting the life of the communities, does not allow effective and smooth implementation of conservation programmes, nor the reactivation of the joint Israeli-Palestinian Technical Committee for Archaeology, as recommended in its previous session;*
5. *Urges all parties concerned with the safeguarding of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage to take appropriate measures to prevent and avoid any further destruction or damage to the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage;*

6. *Requests the World Heritage Centre to continue its efforts, in liaison with the concerned parties, in order to elaborate an Action Plan for the preservation and rehabilitation of this heritage, and to continue assisting the Palestinian institutions concerned in reinforcing their capacity in the protection, preservation and management of the cultural and natural heritage;*
7. *Encourages the States Parties to contribute to the implementation of such an Action Plan;*
8. *Invites the World Heritage Centre to present a report on the progress made to the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session in 2007.*