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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Thirty-third session

Seville, Spain
22-30 June 2009

**Item 12 of the Provisional Agenda: 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 World Heritage Committee since its 26th session in Budapest (2002), which aim at providing technical assistance 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 World Heritage Committee in its decision **32 COM 12**.

Draft Decision: 33 COM 12, see Point IV

I. Background

1. Since the 26th session of the World Heritage Committee in Budapest in 2002, the Secretariat assists the Palestinian Authority in the protection of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage. Since then, the allocation of funds by the World Heritage Committee (USD 500,000) has contributed to activities implemented by the UNESCO Office in Ramallah, in close consultation with the responsible Palestinian authorities, mainly the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, with the support of the World Heritage Centre.

II. Activities related to World Heritage in the Palestinian Territories

2. At its 32nd session (Quebec City, 2008), the World Heritage Committee adopted Decision **32 COM 12** by which it requested the World Heritage Centre to continue assisting the Palestinian institutions in charge of the protection of the heritage. Therefore, the activities initiated in the previous years will continue, as much as the situation prevailing on the ground allows. These notably include:
 - a) Outlines of conservation plans for the old city of Nablus, including the management plan of the archaeological site of Tell Balata, in Nablus (assessment, emergency conservation and planning tools);
 - b) Continuation of the project for the safeguarding of cultural landscapes;
 - c) Continued support to the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat, including the provision of assistance in the preparation work for potential future nominations through documenting, mapping and zoning of at least three sites included in the *Inventory of Palestinian cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding universal value*.
3. Violations against cultural properties were reported, and phenomena such as looting of archaeological sites and illicit trafficking of archaeological objects increased significantly due to the economical decline. The conditions on the ground imposed drastic changes in the implementation of the activities, with a special focus on Gaza, in the framework of the "Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan".
4. However, a number of activities were carried out, namely:
 - a) The preparation of the full fledged proposal for the holistic conservation and management of Tell Balata Archaeological Park, in Nablus, and consequent fund-raising addressing the Government of The Netherlands that already had expressed interest (site No. 12 of the *Inventory: Historic Nablus*);
 - b) The submission of a proposal to the Prince Claus Foundation for the provision of emergency protection measures for the archaeological site of Tell Umm Amer (Saint Hilarion Monastery), in Gaza (site No. 14 of the *Inventory*);
 - c) The support to the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat, including the reprint and distribution of the *Inventory* in English and Arabic; the

publication of the Educational Manual on Cultural Heritage to be distributed and tested in a selection of Palestinian schools; the preparation of the Nomination dossier for “Bethlehem, birthplace of Jesus” (see below); the continuation of the capacity-building for staff members of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, as well as facilitating their participation in international meetings (workshop on inventories –Euromed Heritage; reflexion workshop on the Future of the World Heritage Convention; workshop on the Periodic Reporting in the Arab States, World Heritage Committee sessions);

- d) The completion of the fieldwork on Cultural Landscapes in relation to the perception of this type of heritage by the local population, as well as the preparation of the management plan and conservation guidelines for the case-study area of Battir, near Bethlehem (site No. 8 of the *Inventory: the Land of Olives and Vines*);
- e) The support to the database/GIS project “Protecting and monitoring archaeological and cultural sites in the Palestinian Territories”, through the provision of technical assistance to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to inventory Palestinian cultural heritage sites, monitor their state of conservation, and build capacities, in the framework of the reinforcement of the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat.

III. Conservation of Palestinian cultural heritage

5. The UNESCO Office in Ramallah, in close coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, has progressed in the implementation of conservation projects, mainly through extra-budgetary funds, such as:

- a) **Bethlehem** - Within the framework of the “Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management Plan (Phase 1)”, funded by the Government of Italy (USD 500,000), terminated on 31 May 2009, concrete results have been achieved, namely: the signature of the “Charter on the Safeguarding of Palestinian Historic Towns and Urban Landscapes (The Bethlehem Charter)” on 21 December 2008, and the finalization of the “Bethlehem Area Strategic Plan”, to be endorsed in May 2009. The Minister of Local Government, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, the Governor of Bethlehem, the Mayors of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour and the Director of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation signed the Charter and are expected to sign the Strategic Plan. The donor is committed to provide funds for the implementation of the second phase of the project, which aims at finalizing the conservation and management plans for the three historic towns, including the *ad hoc* Management Plan for “Bethlehem, birthplace of Jesus” as a potential World Heritage site.
- b) **Nablus** - Within the framework of the “Revitalization Plan of the Old City of Nablus”, sponsored by the Munir Sukhtian Group-Jordan (USD 100,000), two sites are under rehabilitation, al Qarion and Habalah, under direct supervision of the Municipality of Nablus and the UNESCO Ramallah Office.
Regarding the “Restoration and adaptive reuse of the Khan al-Wakala (Phase 2)”, a project funded by the European Commission (1,327,000 euros), rehabilitation works are on going, as per the approved project.

- c) **Jericho** - In the framework of the project concerning the “Design of the protective shelters of the mosaic area of the Great Bath Hall of Qasr Hisham in Jericho and other facilities of the Archaeological Park”, UNESCO is providing financial support and technical expertise. The USAID-funded project has been concluded in October 2008, with the construction of basic facilities such as access road, bus and car parking, rest rooms, on-site museum and interpretation centre, gate, pathways and signage. UNESCO received a contribution of USD 56,000 from the Czech Republic to continue the comprehensive design of the protective structures, guided by Peter Zumthor, recently awarded with the prestigious Pritzker Prize 2009, in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and a Palestinian engineering office.
- d) **Hebron** - UNESCO is working on the rehabilitation of historic sites in the Hebron Governorate, within the framework of the Spain-funded MDG-F Achievement Fund.

IV. Draft Decision

Draft Decision: 33 COM 12

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC-09/33.COM/12,*
2. *Recalling Decision **32 COM 12** adopted at its 32nd session (Quebec City, 2008),*
3. *Takes note of the information provided by the World Heritage Centre and commends the efforts of all professionals involved in preserving the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage despite difficult conditions;*
4. *Regrets the recent destructions in Gaza, and urges all parties concerned with the safeguarding of heritage to take appropriate measures to prevent and avoid any damage to the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage;*
5. *Requests the World Heritage Centre to continue assisting the Palestinian institutions concerned in reinforcing their capacity in the protection, preservation and management of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage;*
6. *Invites the States Parties to contribute to the implementation of the above activities and decides to allocate an amount of USD 70,000 from the World Heritage Fund to this end during the 2010-2011 biennium ;*
7. *Further requests the World Heritage Centre to present a progress report to the World Heritage Committee at its 35th session in 2011.*