



Paris, February 25th 2015.

Mr Director,

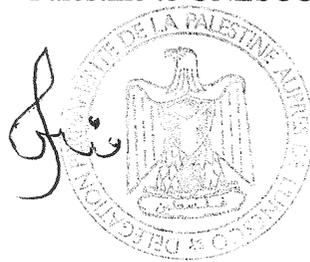
The Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO presents it complement to you and is pleased to submit herewith the State of Conservation report concerning the following sites:

- Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem (Palestine) and its annexes,
- Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir, Palestine.

Furthermore, our Delegation has no objection to make these reports available online.

The Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO avails itself of this opportunity to renew to you the expression of its highest consideration.

Permanent Delegation of
Palestine to UNESCO



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State of Palestine

State of Conservation Report for

**Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern
Jerusalem, Battir (1492) – Palestine**



**Bethlehem, Palestine
February 2015**

The State of Conservation Report (SoC) for the World heritage Site (WHS) of the **Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines: Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir (1492)** was prepared by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in close cooperation with Battir village Council and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem (CCHP).

Contents

1	Executive Summary	4
2.	Proposed Desired State of Conservation.....	6
	A. Proposed Desired State of Conservation.....	6
	B. Proposed Corrective Measures are as follows:	6
3.	Implemented and Future actions to Secure the Conservation of the Property....	7
	3.1. The Geo-political Situation and the Case against the “Wall*” at the Israeli High Court of Justice	8
	3.2. Conservation of the Cultural Landscape	9
	3.3. Enhancing the Physical Situation in and around the Property	11
	3.4. Conservation and Management of the Property	14
4.	Conclusion.....	15

1 Executive Summary

Palestine, Land of Olives and Vines: Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir, Palestine (Ref. 1492) was inscribed on World Heritage List on an emergency basis, on the basis of criteria (iv) and (v); and immediately on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2014 after acknowledging that the landscape had become vulnerable under the impact of socio-cultural and geo-political transformations that could bring irreversible damage to its authenticity and integrity, citing specifically the start of construction of an Israeli “Wall” that may isolate farmers from fields they have cultivated for centuries.

Since inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger on 20th June 2014 at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee (Doha, Qatar, 15-25 June 2014), Palestine has prepared proposed a desired state of conservation and corrective measures aimed at ameliorating the situation of the site in respect to the various factors that affect the property.

Key corrective measure focused on the imminent threat derived from an Israeli plan to construct a “Wall” along the property, which would bring irreversible damage to its authenticity and integrity. As mentioned in the nomination dossier, in 2012 the Village Council of Battir had filed a petition before the Israeli Supreme Court to counter the construction of the “Wall”. Following the inscription of the property **on World Heritage List** in June 2014, **the Israeli High Court of Justice on 4 January 2015 decided to freeze the construction of the “Wall”**, however the decision was made due to the lack of funds for 2015, and the state reserved the right to build the Wall through the Nahal Refaim Valley in the future, saying it believes its route takes into account environmental objections raised by Friends of the Earth Middle East.

Although these developments are to be considered as a positive factor towards the protection of the property, the geo-political changes still affecting the property, as proposed in the nomination document, are foreseen to remain unchanged. The geo-political changes still accelerate the processes of abandonment of agricultural practices seriously affecting the socio-cultural factors, which has already been in decline due to economic and cultural transformations dynamics that affect many other rural areas of the world. The combinations of these two macro scale factors have a negative impact on the functionality of the landscape, with increasingly disruptive effects on its integrity.

Taking into consideration that this cultural landscape is affected by external and internal factors, that are both negatively affecting the quality of the landscape at the visual, ecological, socio-economic and cultural levels, Palestine is committed to continue its action in promoting and implementing a set of corrective measures,

especially those aiming to conserve and manage the property in line with international standards.

Realizing that a “Management Plan” and a “Conservation Plan” is considered a key component that shall ensure an adequate respect and effective safeguarding of the property and its embedded values. The stakeholders are committed to proceed on the preparation of holistic “Management Plan” and “Conservation Plan” for the integrated safeguarding and sustainable use of the property based on the guidelines prepared in the nomination file. Also, the plan shall be based on earlier efforts of Battir village council to prepare this plan.

In the light of the above, and in spite of the successful developments achieved since inscription of the property, Palestine wishes to retain the property “**Palestine, Land of Olives and Vines: Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir**” from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

2. Proposed Desired State of Conservation

Until the preparation of this report, the desired state of conservation and the corrective measures for the removal of the Site from the Danger List was not adopted yet. Accordingly, a proposed Desired State of Conservation was prepared by the stakeholders based on the emergency basis that justified the inscription of the Site on World Heritage in Danger, and on the factors that are affecting the property according to the nomination document.

A. Proposed Desired State of Conservation

- Dismissing the plans to build a “Wall” along the property, or within its settings.
- Retrieving an desired state of conservatoin of the agricultural terraces and their components including the watchtowers and drystone walls throughout the property.
- Enhancing the physical situation in and around the WHS and its buffer zone.

B. Proposed Corrective Measures are as follows:

B.1. *Dismissing the plans to build a “Wall” along the property, or within its settings.*

A binding decision adopted by Israel stipulating that no “Wall” shall be constructed in, or around the site. The decision has to secure the protection of the site and settings. It is worth mentioning that on 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice considered that the construction by Israel of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its associated régime are contrary to international law and are considered illegal; hence here that the Wall may refer to any barrier whether it is a physical wall or a fence.

The decision has to be clear; it is worth pointing out that the decision of the Israeli High court did not close off the future possibility for the Israeli government to ask to build a “Wall” through Battir.

This binding decision is in conformity with Article 6, section 3, of the World Heritage Convention (1972), which states that “*Each State Party to this Convention undertakes not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage referred to in Articles 1 and 2 situated on the territory of other States Parties to this Convention*”.

B.2. *Retrieving an appropriate state of conservatoin of the agricultural terraces and their components including the watchtowers and drystone walls throughout the property.*

In order to retrieve an appropriate state of conservation for the cultural landscape, the following should be accomplished:

- Prepare a Conservation and Management Plan for the World Heritage Site; the conservation plan should indicate the desired state of conservation and the measures that should be implemented in order to achieve it.
- Prepare a set of indicators for monitoring the property.
- Prepare detailed specification for the actions that should be implemented in order to achieve the desired state of conservation.
- Full implementation of all actions, which are considered important as indicated in the conservation plan, for reaching the desired state of conservation based on the indicators.

Several restrictions and constraints that prevent the farmers from restoring the terraces and the agricultural watchtowers is applied by the Israeli occupation authorities in areas that are close to the borders; however, the various stakeholders and local community are committed to retrieving the desired state of conservation, and shall work together on the preparation of a comprehensive conservation and management plan based on previous efforts of the village council and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

B.3. Enhancing the physical situation in and around the WHS and its buffer zone

Several factors, including internal and external factors, have contributed to the deterioration of the physical situation throughout the village of Battir. This deterioration, which is mainly related to the lack of sewage and appropriate water network, is negatively affecting the agricultural terraces that are in close contact with the village.

The proposed conservation plan and management plan shall take into consideration these factors and shall indicate the necessary corrective measures to ensure enhancing the physical situation in and around the site. In general, the enhancement of the physical situation of the property and retrieving an appropriate state of conservation not only depend on socio-cultural factors but also on geo-political factors.

3. Implemented and Future actions to Secure the Conservation of the Property

The proposed Desired State of Conservation was prepared based on the geo-political and socio-cultural factors that are negatively affecting the property, as indicated in the nomination document, and as acknowledged in the evaluation report prepared by the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee. The various stakeholders

are committing to safeguarding the cultural landscape, and do realize that it is their responsibility to develop actions that aim to achieve this goal.

Since inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger on 20th June 2014 during the 38th session of the World Heritage, progress towards achieving the proposed Desired State of Conservation has been sought by the various stakeholders. In fact, the stakeholders, including the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Battir village council and its Landscape Eco-museum and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation, in addition to the local community, were aware of the threats that are affecting the landscape and were implementing actions to face these threats before the inscription date.

In addition to the projects and activities that were mentioned in the nomination document, the following actions took place since the inscriptions; these actions are divided to four categories that include: (1) the geo-political situation and the case at the Israeli High Court of Justice against the construction of the “Wall”, (2) the conservation of some of the components of the cultural landscape, (3) the enhancement of the physical situation in and around the property, and (4) conservation and management of the property.

3.1. The Geo-political Situation and the Case against the “Wall” at the Israeli High Court of Justice

The geo-political context in which the property lies, and namely the direct and indirect affects of the illegal construction of settlements on surrounding hills, the proposed illegal construction of the “Wall” are considered the major threat on the authenticity and integrity of the property.

On 4th January 2015, the Israeli High Court of Justice froze plans for the construction of the “Wall” along the property. This concluded a three-years legal battle in response to petitions submitted by the village of Battir supported by the State of Palestine, and Friends of the Earth Middle East. The decision came after the Israeli government chose not to reauthorize the 2006 plan for a three-kilometre stretch of the “Wall”, and subsequently revealed that the plan was not a high security priority.

The decision came after Israel’s Minister of Defence said the state did not intend to complete the Wall in Battir, because it was not a priority and the area is not a security threat; this was a change from his previous position that building the Wall through Battir was a security necessity for Israel. The court did not close off the future possibility that the Israeli government will ask to build the Wall through Battir. However, the ruling said that if that happens, the state would have to put in a new request, and the environmental groups would then be able to issue new objections.

The above mentioned decision of the Israeli High Court of Justice was taken after the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List and on the List of World Heritage in Danger during the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee. Although, this is a positive factor towards protecting the Site and its authenticity and integrity, the threats resulting from the construction of a “Wall” along the property remain valid until a binding decision adopted by Israel stipulating that no “Wall” shall be constructed in, or around the site. The decision has to secure the protection of the site and its settings.

Moreover, illegal construction of settlements on surrounding hills is affecting negatively the quality of the landscape at the visual setting and ecological system of the property. For a great part, these factors are related to direct acts of the Israeli occupation authorities, and shall be also dismissed upon a binding decision ensures the protection of the property. Such acts are progressively enclaving both the territorial area and the inhabitants of Battir, and thus severely threatening the integrity of its landscape and the sustainability of its ecological and environmental equilibrium, in addition to preventing the local community from maintaining their agricultural lands in the areas that are close to the settlements.

(For further information, refer to Chapter 7 of the nomination document)

3.2. Conservation of the Cultural Landscape

The various stakeholders realize their role in achieving an appropriate state of conservation of the various components of the property, and have been working tirelessly on implementing several projects in this field. Several projects were implemented in this field before the inscription of the property, and were noted in the nomination document. Since the inscription of the property, several other projects were designated by the various stakeholders.

The local community in Battir have worked together on “Battir 2020”, a creative initiative that aims to implement sustainable cultural events through setting up working domestic groups in various fields. These groups shall work on implementing awareness programmes for the inhabitants about the WHS and the importance of maintaining its Outstanding Universal Value. The initiative has been established by the youth of the village, and has 50 participating young women and men.

Until the preparation of this report, the following projects and activities were implemented in this category:

No.	Project	Completion date	Brief Description
1	Rehabilitation of traditional irrigation system	November 2014	<p>The project included the maintenance of circa 400 meters of the water channels stretching between the spring of 'Ain al-Balad to the irrigated fields.</p> <p>The works included periodic maintenance works that are implemented by the farmers, in addition to the rehabilitation of the surrounding yards.</p> <p><i>Funded by: UNRWA</i></p>

The local community also intensified the work on the periodic maintenance of the dry-stone walls throughout the property, and various voluntary campaigns were implemented by the village council and the local community in the preservation activities, which took place between April and June 2014.

The dumpsite, which was reclaimed in 2010, is currently recovering. Moreover, the Joint Service Council have increased number of collection times of the solid waste from the containers, which shall contribute to eliminating dumping the solid waste in the open fields; the Joint Service Council shall be working on increasing the number of containers in the village and equipping new vehicles for collecting the solid waste, which shall enhance the efficiency of the process.

Future actions shall be designed to ensure that conservation of the property, and to enhance its various components. The proposed designs and impact assessment reports of the projects shall be submitted to the World Heritage Centre and its Advisory Bodies in order to obtain their feedback on each project before the commencing with the work. These actions include:

No.	Project	Expected Completion date	Brief Description
1	Rehabilitation of the Spring of 'Ain al-Balad	October 2015	The project aims at the rehabilitation of Ain al-Balad and its surroundings; the spring is located in the buffer zone. The project shall include maintenance works of the spring and minor interventions on its surrounding.

			<i>Funded by: Battir village council, and civil society organizations</i>
2	Shops Renovation	March 2016	Rehabilitation of the shops located along the main street in Battir, the project aims at enhancing the physical situation in the area. <i>Funded by: Battir Village Council</i>

3.3. Enhancing the Physical Situation in and around the Property

The various stakeholders realize the negative impacts that result from the weak infrastructure of the village, which is an essential part of the buffer zone, on the Site and its various components. Since the inscription of the Site on the World Heritage List, the stakeholders have been seeking to enhance the physical situation in and around the property, and have worked on designing and implementing various activities in this field.

Several rehabilitation projects that aimed to adapt abandoned traditional buildings inside the historic centre of Battir (the core zone) to use them as facilities to serve the site. These projects included the rehabilitation of Dar Al-Bader as a locale for Battir Landscape Eco-museum and Visitors Information Centre (2008), and the rehabilitation of Abu Hassan as a guesthouse (2012) for the visitors of the property.

Until the preparation of this report, the following projects were implemented in this category:

No.	Project	Completion date	Brief Description
1	Enhancement of several roads within the village	July 2015	The project aims at the rehabilitation at various streets in the village including: the main street, the road that leads to the public park, and the rehabilitation of the public park and its parking lot. <i>Funded by: United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the West Bank Compete Project</i>
2	Renewing the main water supply network	November 2015	Replacing the main water supply network in the village of Battir.

			<i>Funded by: United States Agency for International Development (USAID)</i>
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Future actions aim to address the threats mentioned in the nomination document. The proposed designs and impact assessment reports shall be submitted to the World Heritage Centre in order to obtain their feedback on each project before the commencing with the work. These actions include:

No.	Project	Expected Completion date	Brief Description
1	Water Supply and Sanitation Improvements for West Bethlehem Villages Project <i>(Hussan, Nahhalin, Battir, Al-Walaja and Wadi Fukin)</i>	March 2015 <i>Completion of feasibility study and conceptual designs</i>	The village council, in cooperation with the Joint Service Council of Bethlehem West Rural Area and the Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WSSA) in Bethlehem, is working on a plan to connect the village with a sewage network that disposes the wastewater in a treatment plant, which will process the water for agricultural purposes. The project aims at improving water supplies and sanitation in these villages; this shall be achieved through reviewing the village sanitation and implementing feasible sanitation, wastewater disposal and treatment options based on village/regional goals and objectives. Upon the completion of the feasibility study and conceptual design, an impact assessment report shall be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for assessment. <i>Funded by: State and Peace-building Fund</i>
2	Establishment of a sewage	November 2015 <i>(commencement</i>	Proposed project to establish a sewage network. An impact

	network	date)	assessment report shall be submitted to the World Heritage Centre upon the preparation of the conceptual designs of the project. <i>Funded by: World Bank</i>
3	Wastewater Treatment Plant for Battir and Hussan	Depends on the advice of the World Heritage Committee	Construction of a wastewater treatment plant to treat the sewage discharged from the villages of Battir and Hussan and to promote the re-use of treated wastewater in the area. It will be established in the buffer zone of the WHS after a comprehensive consultation with the World Heritage Committee and its Advisory Bodies. The treatment plant shall contribute to resolving underground water pollution, which is causing severe damage to the springs and irrigated crops. <i>Funded by: Italian International Cooperation (committed)</i>
4	Renewing Water Distribution Networks	July 2015 <i>(Commencement date)</i>	Renewing the secondary water distribution networks in the village. <i>Funded by: World Bank & implemented in Cooperation with Ministry of Local Government</i>
5	Rehabilitation & pavement of internal roads	December 2015	The project aims at the rehabilitation at internal in the village. <i>Funded by: Ministry of Local Government</i>

UNESCO Office in Ramallah has been actively involved in supporting the safeguarding of the site as part of the collective efforts for the safeguarding of the WH property. Several visits to the property and meetings with the Village Council and potential donors took place since the inscription of the site on the World

Heritage List. These meetings aimed to jointly review and identify conservation and management challenges, propose solutions and also to integrate them in comprehensive projects for the safeguarding, rehabilitation, and promotion of the agro-cultural landscape. The work is being carried out in cooperation with local and national stakeholders and relevant UN agencies for funding.

Moreover, UNESCO Office in Ramallah has proposed a joint project *“Safeguarding the Bethlehem Western Villages; Environmental Protection, Agricultural Practices and Livelihood Support, Cultural Heritage Preservation, Landscape Planning and Sustainable Empowerment of Rural and Refugee Communities in the Bethlehem Western Villages”* within UNDAF (United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2014-2016) for the State of Palestine, as it had been approved by Palestinian government.

This preliminary proposal involved UNESCO, FAO, UNDP, UN-Habitat, in cooperation with OCHA and under the coordination of UNSCO, and was submitted under the UNDAF priority area *“Urban Development and Natural Resources Management and Infrastructure”*. The proposal targets six villages in Bethlehem Governorate including the village of Battir. It was submitted through UN Resident Coordinator’s office to a number of key Gulf partners in June 2014 for consideration and possible funding. The project remains pending and the partners are expecting feedback from the potentials donors.

3.4. Conservation and Management of the Property

In order to achieve comprehensive conservation and management of the property, the various stakeholders, have been working together on the preparation of various tools that ensure their goals. These tools include: a conservation plan, a management plan, and a physical master plan for the land-use in the village.

Conservation Plan

The stakeholders recognize the importance of the conservation plan in order to indicate the actions necessary to realise the desired state of conservation for the Site. Until the preparation of this report, a comprehensive survey of the site and its components was completed and digitized, and the work on identifying the various factors that are affecting the landscape shall start in the coming few months. The initial surveys and database for the site was implemented though Battir Conservation and Management Plan project, and the surveys are updated regularly by the village council and its eco-museum.

The work on a comprehensive conservation plan is expected to be finalized by the end of 2017; however initial actions that shall contribute to achieving the desired

state of conservation were identified by the stakeholders, and are being implemented or shall be implemented in the near future.

Management Plan

Initial efforts have been undertaken by the various stakeholders towards realizing a Management Plan based on the guidelines of the management plan presented in the nomination file, and based on earlier efforts of undertaken Battir village council. The guidelines clearly set out necessary aims and policies that are needed to guide all interventions and actions required to preserve and sustain the outstanding Universal Values of the property.

The work on the management plan is expected to be finalized by the end of 2017,. The plan shall be prepared by the various stakeholders (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Ministry of Environment, Battir Village Council and its Landscape Eco-museum and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem) in addition to the local community in Battir.

Physical Master Plan

At the time, Battir village council is working with the Ministry of Local Government on the preparation of a physical master plan for the village. The Plan is being prepared according to Building and Planning Law no. 79 (1966), and aims to regulate the land-use and building licenses within the village; the plan shall cover parts of the core and buffer zones of the World Heritage Site. The master plan shall be finalized by the end of this year.

4. Conclusion

The threats resulting from the construction of a “Wall” by Israel along the property remain valid until a binding decision, in conformity with Article 6, section 3 of the WH Convention (1972), is adopted by the concerned Israeli authorities stipulating that no” “Wall” can ever be constructed in, or around the site is necessary to dismiss this threat, and ensures a proper protection of the property and its integrity and authenticity.

In the light of the above, although considering the development of the past seven months, and the efforts of the various stakeholders in enhancing the state of conservation of the property and its settings, as success factors towards removing part of the threats that are affecting the property, Palestine wishes to retain the property “Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir” from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Palestine, Land of Olives and Vines
Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir



Panoramic view of the property



Village of Battir



Agricultural Watchtower



Agricultural Fields



Farmers of Battir



Ancient olive press



Ain Bardama Water Spring