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## **Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem (Palestine) No 1433**

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### **Official name as proposed by the State Party**

Birthplace of Jesus: the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage route, Bethlehem

### **Location**

Bethlehem Governorate

### **Brief description**

The Church of the Nativity was originally constructed in 399AD above a cave, traditionally acknowledged since at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD as being the birthplace of Jesus. Its reconstruction after a fire in the mid-6th century is the basic structure that has survived to the present.

During the Crusader era of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the church was embellished with paintings and mosaics, traces of which survive. Since mediaeval times the church has become increasingly embedded within a complex of mainly ecclesiastical buildings, including Greek Orthodox, Franciscan and Armenian Convents.

During various periods over the past 1,500 years, Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity have been major pilgrim destinations. The eastern end of the traditional route from Jerusalem to the Church, which is followed ceremonially each year by the Patriarchs of the three Churches at their several Christmases, is included within the boundaries.

The ensemble is put forward as the first part of a serial nomination, which it is said will include sites inside and surrounding Bethlehem, particularly those related to the story of the birth and life of Jesus.

### **Category of property**

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

## **1 Basic data**

### **Background**

The nomination was submitted by the State Party as an Emergency Nomination as the Church of the Nativity and its architectural complex are considered to have greatly suffered from the lack of proper regular and restoration works because of the political situation in the area and region since 1967. Despite the efforts of the local religious Authorities and the insistence of the international Community and particularly UNESCO, it is

stated that no major restoration works have been undertaken at the Nativity Church. Furthermore, local Palestinian Authority are stated to be having great difficulties in the provision of materials and equipment needed for the maintenance and restoration works because of the lack of free movement imposed by the Israeli forces.

The main reasons for the decay and degradation of the architectural complex of the Church of the Nativity are considered by the State Party to be:

- Water penetration through the roof;
- The use of inappropriate building materials;
- Lack of proper maintenance, especially in the last 50 years;
- The huge number of visitors that are adding up to the speed of deterioration inside the Church.

### **Included in the Tentative List**

8 March 2012

### **International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination**

None

### **Date received by the World Heritage Centre**

27 January 2011

### **Date received by ICOMOS**

8 March 2012

### **Consultations**

ICOMOS has consulted several independent experts.

### **Technical Field Visit**

An ICOMOS Technical Field visit was undertaken at the property between 30 April and 1 May 2012. This technical visit was only to the Church of the Nativity and only considered the state of conservation of those aspects of its fabric that are related to the request for Emergency Inscription.

### **Additional information requested and received from the State Party**

On 13 March 2012, ICOMOS requested the State Party to provide supplementary information on the following:

- Current ground plan for the Church of the Nativity;
- Plan of all the churches and of the overall nominated ensemble;
- Recent conservation history of the Church of the Nativity and of its associated monastic buildings, including any recent architects' surveys of the Church of the Nativity and details of work undertaken in the Church of St Catherine and St Jerome's refectory in the late 1990s, as part of the Bethlehem 2000 project.

On 4 April 2012 the State Party provided further details on the description of the property, its history and development and on its state of conservation and the

information has been incorporated into the relevant sections below.

### **Date of ICOMOS approval of this report**

14 May 2012

## **2 The property**

### **Description**

Bethlehem lies 10km south of Jerusalem in the fertile limestone hills of the biblical Ephraim. The town developed on one moderately sized hill with the Church of the Nativity on a nearby hill, separated by a saddle of land.

Until around a hundred years ago, the Church of the Nativity, and its surrounding walled monastic complexes, dominated an open terraced landscape. It was described in 1887 as looking 'like a large feudal castle'. Today the town has spread around the church and out into that landscape leaving only the comparatively recent bell towers rising above the buildings. Its massive buttressed walls are now largely hidden from all but close views.

The centre of Bethlehem, consisting of the two hills and the extent of the settlement that existed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been delineated as the 'historic centre' for management and conservation processes. This forms the buffer zone for the nominated area.

The nominated area consists of the following:

- The Church of the Nativity
- Latin, Greek Orthodox, Franciscan and Armenian Convents and churches
- Bell towers
- Terraced gardens
- Pilgrimage Route

### **The Church of the Nativity**

By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, a cave at Bethlehem had become venerated as the birthplace of Jesus. Under the patronage of the Roman Emperor Constantine, a church was built above and around the cave. Completed in 339AD, its octagonal sanctuary allowed worshipers to look down into the traditional manger. Adjoining this was a five aisled basilican church with massive monolithic columns topped by Corinthian capitals, and to the west an open atrium. The church stood at the east end of a long street that formed the backbone of the nearby small town. This first church was demolished after a fire in the 6<sup>th</sup> century but its highly elaborate geometric mosaic floors survived.

The 6<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding, under the Emperor Justinian kept the form of the nave but incorporated the cave under an apsed chancel. The atrium was moved further west and separated from the nave by a narthex across the width of the building. The basic structure of this second church survives.

This new church had 46 columns of red limestone (from a local quarry) with Corinthian capitals. On thirty of them are traces of paintings that belong to a 12<sup>th</sup> century Crusader renovation of the church. The images are of the heavenly hierarchy, and also saints, bishops and sanctified monarchs.

In Crusader times, two walls of the nave and a chancel apse were also decorated with mosaics, the two main ones depicting the seven General Councils of the (Latin) Church and the six Provincial Councils of the Greeks, thus showing fundamental agreement between the two. Some of these mosaics were damaged by vandals in 1872 and others by a defective roof and only fragments now remain. The mosaics were however recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Beneath the present nave floor of red stone, lie the remains of a geometrically patterned mosaic floor dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. A carved wooden door within the central doorway to the nave was a gift from the King of Armenia in 1227. Within the church are one 16<sup>th</sup> and several 17<sup>th</sup> century icons, some of which have been reconstructed or renovated.

Two flights of steps lead down from the aisles of the church to the Cave of the Nativity. Its marble floor was ornamented in 1717 with a star to mark the birthplace. This was removed in 1847 (an incident that contributed to the Crimean War) and replaced in 1853. The walls of the cave are partly lined with marble and partly covered with silks and buckram. A lower grotto associated with the manger, is adorned with marble colonettes of the Crusader period.

The narthex has been subdivided at different times and is now in three parts. The northern part has Byzantine frescoes on part of its walls and is used by the Franciscan St Helena's chapel. The southern part is used by the Armenian convent. The central part still provides a porch to the nave. The timber roof dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The 6<sup>th</sup> century atrium at the west end no longer exists. It is now mainly an open space that was paved in 1932.

Latin, Greek Orthodox, Franciscan and Armenian churches and Convents

Since early medieval times the Church has become incorporated into a complex of mainly monastic buildings.

No detailed plans of these complexes have been provided.

### **Church of Saint Catherine of Alexandria**

To the north, is the Church of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, the church for Roman Catholics, since their exclusion in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Its present building was constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church incorporates in its northern end fragments of an earlier building, possibly the chapter house of a 12<sup>th</sup> century convent.

For the Millennium celebrations, the church was expanded, by moving the eastern wall some 21 metres.

A 12<sup>th</sup> century arcaded courtyard uncovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the re-building of the church, was restored in 1948 using capitals and columns of the 12<sup>th</sup> century monastery.

At the western end of the Church is St Helena's Chapel in the base of the northern of the two bell towers added in Crusader times. The chapel has a cross vaulted ceiling. The walls were decorated with fresco paintings of which traces remain. These were restored in 1998. At the eastern end, stairs lead down to the Grotto of St Jerome.

#### Franciscan Monastery

This monastery is also to the north of the Church of the Nativity. It is separated by a cloister that was first added in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Western church has been represented by the Franciscans since 1347.

The current buildings are on part of the site of a 12<sup>th</sup> century convent. They date from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and enclose the barrel-vaulted remains of the convent refectory on the north side of the cloister. The west part of the convent was destroyed in 1982 by the construction of the Franciscan pilgrimage residence and the east part by the extension of St Catherine's church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Armenian Convent

To the south of the Church of the Nativity, and entered from the narthex, is the Armenian convent. Of all the monastic structures this is the earliest with substantial parts dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and having cross vaulted roofs. The more recent parts were constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The medieval refectory, known as the School of St Jerome, was restored for the Millennium celebrations.

#### Greek Orthodox Convent

This convent lies adjacent to the Church of the Nativity on its south and eastern sides and consists of a chapel, formerly part of the Sacristy, and a massive tower of fine rusticated masonry constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps on a 6<sup>th</sup> century base.

#### Bell towers

Three bell towers are now a prominent part of the skyline. One was added in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Greek Orthodox Convent and the other two in the 1930s to the Church of St Catherine and the Franciscan Convent.

#### Terraced gardens

Open terraced areas to the east and south-east of the Church of the Nativity are now the only remaining open areas within the borders of the historic town of Bethlehem. They are nominated for their possible archaeological interest.

#### Pilgrimage Route

A short section of the Pilgrimage route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, which follows the historical route believed to have been taken by the Virgin Mary and Joseph, is included in the nominated area. The route is used for the procession of the Patriarchs at Christmas.

The paved road as an urban street is barely two hundred years old. Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the start of this section would have been in open landscape and pilgrims would have had views of the fortress like Church surrounded by its walled monastic complex.

Now the street runs through an urban area with the buildings alongside mainly built in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many of the largely one-storey houses and shops incorporate Roman-Byzantine building techniques such as cross-arched room structures, vaults, and limestone 'cociopesto'. The buildings are, however, not included in the nominated area.

#### Future Nominations

The nomination dossier states that a second nomination will include the Historic Town of Bethlehem, which forms the Buffer Zone for the current nomination, and that further nominations could include the Historic Town of Beit Sahour, the Shepherds 'Field, Beit Sahour, and Mar Saba Monastery in the Desert to the east. The link between these sites will be their association with the story of the birth and life of Jesus.

#### History and development

##### Conservation History

The roof of the Church of the nativity is documented as being repaired in 1480 under the supervision of Tomacello, the Guardian of Mount Zion. To repair the roof, wood was brought from Vince and lead was provided by King Edward IV of England.

In 1670 the covering lead was repaired with the work being undertaken by the Greek Orthodox Church. The timber was also repaired with wood imported from Istanbul and the carpenters were brought from Chios and the Greek city of Mityelene. Since then the roof has been repaired twice, first in 1842, also by the Greek Orthodox Church, and most recently in 1990, when works were implemented by the Israeli military authorities.

The outer lead coverings are clearly of some antiquity. There still appears to be some doubt about their date, but much of the leadwork could be the 1480 lead. Although there are reports of lead being stripped from the roof in 1670, it seems that this may have been partial. The further repairs (1842) following the earthquake in 1834 solely addressed the effects of the quake. Whatever their date the roof coverings are immediately recognizable as the same as those in published photographs of 1935.

The current timber structure of the Church of the Nativity is said in the nomination dossier to date mainly from repairs of 1842. However, ICOMOS considers that some of the timber could date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier, as it appears that at no time has a comprehensive replacement of the whole fabric of the roof been made.

### **3 Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity**

#### **Comparative analysis**

The brief comparative analysis suggests that Bethlehem is 'genuinely unique, in the proper sense of the word, and to seek analogues in a World Heritage context may mislead and possibly demean'.

The analysis appears to be looking for comparators rather than demonstrating that none can be found. It suggests that Bethlehem could be said to be similar to the Vatican, Italy, Lumbini, Nepal, and Takht-e-Suleiman, Iran.

What the brief analysis does not do is to demonstrate why Bethlehem, in terms of a combination of its fabric, associations, and use, can be said to be exceptional.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis as set out is incomplete but that a more thorough analysis could justify inclusion of this property on the World Heritage List.

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#### **Justification of Outstanding Universal Value**

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD the Church of the Nativity has been associated with the birthplace of Jesus;
- The present Church, largely of mid-6<sup>th</sup> century date, is the oldest Christian church in daily use;
- The Church is now embedded in an extraordinary ensemble of mainly monastic buildings, overseen by members of the Greek Orthodox, the Order of St Francis and the Armenian Church;
- For most of the past 1500 years, Bethlehem has been a pilgrim destination;
- The Christian Christmas, centred on Bethlehem, is the most widely-celebrated religious festival in the world.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated complex does have the potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value for the way its fabric and its associations have combined to reflect the extraordinary influence of Christianity in spiritual and political terms over 1500 years.

#### **Integrity and authenticity**

##### **Integrity**

The nominated areas encompass the entirety of the Church of the Nativity and its associated monastic buildings as well as an area of terraced land to the east and a short stretch of the Pilgrimage Route. It thus includes all the buildings that form the focus of pilgrimage and the cave that is believed to be the birthplace of Jesus.

The integrity of the surroundings of the property are however problematic in terms of the context of the Church of the Nativity and approaches to it as a spiritual centre. The boundaries are tightly drawn in a way that dissociates the complex from its urban setting. The rationale for including a short section of the Pilgrimage Route, but without the buildings either side of it, are not clear in terms of how this can be reflected on the ground.

The lack of a full evaluation mission has made it impossible to consider the precise relationship between the Church and Monastic complex, the stretch of Pilgrimage Route, and the town, and thus how far the town contributes to its value. However the nomination dossier clearly acknowledges the great urban pressure that is disturbing the traditional urban fabric, leading to new constructions around the nominated areas and having a negative impact on views to and from the property.

##### **Authenticity**

The association of the site with the place that was believed to be the birthplace of Jesus is documented from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and from then on the buildings added to it have been constructed to enhance this religious significance. The main church largely dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but retains its 4<sup>th</sup> century floor, and has 12<sup>th</sup> century and later alterations. The 12<sup>th</sup> century additions reflect the Crusades that led to one of the upsurges in pilgrimage activity.

From medieval times the main church has been supported by monastic communities for which there is strong material evidence. The buildings of one of the monastic complexes dates back to at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century while there is evidence under the others for earlier monastic buildings dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from the Armenian Convent, most of their current structures date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The ability of the property to convey its spiritual links appears to a degree to be compromised by the lack of control for development and use in its immediate surroundings. The nomination dossier calls it 'one of the most historic and significant places on earth'. Yet many visitors are apparently disappointed by the reality.

The link between the Church and its monastic complexes and the town of Bethlehem needs also to be strengthened in terms of the way the two developed in tandem over the centuries.

The lack of details in the nomination dossier on the fabric of the buildings and the lack of a full evaluation mission to consider their current conservation means that it is not possible to provide a proper statement of authenticity.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity cannot be properly ascertained at the present time.

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#### **Criteria under which inscription is proposed**

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iv) and (vi).

*Criterion (iv): be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Church of the Nativity is an outstanding example of an early church in a remarkable architectural ensemble which illustrates both a significant stage in human history in the 4th–6th centuries AD and in later stages up to the present century.

ICOMOS considers that the fabric of Church of the Nativity and its monastic ensemble reflect two significant stages in human history. These are the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity which led to the development of a church on the site believed to be associated with Jesus's birth, and to the power and influence of Christianity in the period of the Crusades that led to the development of monastic communities and to embellishments of the Church of the Nativity.

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ICOMOS considers that the property has the capacity to justify this criterion, but a full study of the attributes that convey its value, needs to be undertaken.

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*Criterion (vi): be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Church of the Nativity, and the Pilgrimage Route to it, are directly associated with events and beliefs of outstanding universal significance.

ICOMOS considers that the Church of the Nativity, is associated with the birth of Jesus, an event of outstanding universal significance, through the buildings that have been developed on the site since the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

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ICOMOS considers that the property has the capacity to justify this criterion but a full study of the attributes that convey its value need to be undertaken.

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ICOMOS considers that the criteria have the potential to be justified but in the absence of a full mission, the conditions of authenticity and integrity have not been fully assessed at this stage, nor has it been possible to fully understand the attributes that convey its value, or an appropriate boundary.

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## **4 Factors affecting the property**

### **Emergency Threats**

The emergency threat is stated to be the present state of conservation of the Church of the Nativity. This is said to be not good in terms of its roof and the potential for water ingress. These are caused both by a lack of repair and a lack of regular maintenance. The nomination dossier states that because of these threats, the Church could be considered endangered.

These threats were considered by the ICOMOS technical expert and details of the situation that the expert observed are set out below under Conservation.

Other threats listed in the nomination dossier, but which have not been assessed by a mission, include the following:

### **Development pressures**

Its location within the historic town of Bethlehem means that the setting of the Church of the Nativity and its monastic buildings are under considerable development pressure. Under an agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Israeli Government, the lands of the city of Bethlehem are divided into two zones, A and C. Zone A includes the nominated property and its surrounding historic town; zone C covers the populated areas surrounding it. Palestinians are allowed to build in Zone A while Zone C is controlled by the Israeli military.

The accelerating need for commercial property and for accommodation is said to be leading to great pressure on the traditional urban fabric around the nominated area.

On the opposite side however, it is said that many younger people are moving out of the historic area to new homes in the suburbs.

### **Tourism pressures**

The large number of visitors is said to be adding to the speed of deterioration inside the Church of the Nativity. High number of visitors within the church can lead to fluctuations in humidity and excessive moisture condensation on the underside of the roof.

High levels of tourists are also leading to pressure for new building within its immediate context. However it is acknowledged that tourism fluctuates with changes in the military situation. It is also underdeveloped and could increase in the future. Currently many tourists are bussed in and do not contribute much to the local economy. Parking is unregulated and vehicles are parked right up to the walls of the church. Old buildings are being knocked down and replaced with new facilities for tourists.

It is acknowledge that the needs of the visitor economy have led to the disfigurement of buildings in the old town and the introduction of inappropriate massive new ones close to the Church of the Nativity. The need for a visitor management strategy is also acknowledged.

#### Environmental pressures

The sharp increase in the number of vehicles, inadequate parking, and small industries within the historic town, have produced a polluted environment that is negatively affecting the façades of both the Church and the buildings along the Pilgrimage Route.

The abandonment and misuse of existing water cisterns is said to lead to water leakage and inadequate water collection, as well as structural damage to buildings. Bethlehem is facing a water crisis as there is insufficient water to be purchased from outside the town and too much leakage.

#### Natural disasters

No natural disasters are mentioned in the text.

#### Impact of climate change

This is not addressed in the nomination dossier.

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ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are lack of conservation of the Church of the Nativity and possibly lack of maintenance and repair of the wider complex. Largely unregulated tourism and development pressures are combining to destroy key elements of the urban fabric that provides the context for the Church and monasteries and to impact on its spiritual qualities.

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## 5 Protection, conservation and management

### Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries enclose the Church of the Nativity and its monastic complexes. They also include a small section of the Pilgrim Route and an open area to the east of the Church.

As no full mission has been undertaken, it is not possible to state whether or not these boundaries are adequate but they appear to be very tightly drawn and to exclude

those parts of the urban fabric that provides the context for the Church and its monasteries.

The buffer zone covers the whole of the historic city of Bethlehem.

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ICOMOS has not been able to assess the adequacy of the boundaries of the nominated property or of its buffer zone.

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### Ownership

The Church of the Nativity is owned by The Greek Orthodox Church, Custody of the Holy Land, and the Armenian Church according to the Status Quo of the Holy Places (1852). The Armenian Convent is owned by the Armenian Patriarchate. The Greek Orthodox Church is owned by The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. The St Catherine's Church and the Catholic Convent are owned by the Custody of the Holy Land.

### Protection

#### Legal Protection

The nomination dossier states that: According to the Jordanian Old Antiquities Law no. 51/yr 1966 applied in the West Bank, Article no 2/c, an Ancient Archaeological Remain is defined as '*any mobile or fixed object constructed, engraved, built, discovered, made or modified by the human race before the year 1700*'. And/or '*any object, mobile or fixed, that dates back to after the year 1700, declared by the minister as an archaeological ancient object*'. These objects are protected under the law.

The implications of this are unclear.

It is also stated that protection is related to planning regulations. These have strengthened in recent years with the approval of *The General Rules for the Protection of Historic Areas and Historic Individual Buildings*, 'Annex no. 10', by the Higher Council of Planning in 2006. These rules are considered part of the Building and Planning Regulations for Local Authorities.

The Rules provide guidelines for interventions in the historic centre. But the nomination dossier states that 'it now remains to be seen whether they can be effective in reversing existing negative impacts and avoiding further inroads to a still largely homogenous urban fabric'.

#### Traditional Protection

The nominated area apart from the pilgrimage route, is controlled jointly by three Christian denominations - the Armenian Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church, although the Greek Orthodox Church is responsible for the majority of the Church of the Nativity.

#### Effectiveness of protection measures

Without a full mission, ICOMOS has not been able to assess the effectiveness of protection measures.

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ICOMOS has not been able to assess whether the protective measures for the property are adequate.

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#### Conservation

Inventories, recording, research

Work on surveys and recording the Church of the Nativity has already started. (see below)

During the works conducted by the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation on the Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management, a general census on the buildings inside the Historic Town of Bethlehem was carried out. It recorded the general state of conservation of all buildings, occupied or otherwise, within the targeted area. It is stated that it is the intention to update the whole record systematically early in 2011.

#### Present state of conservation

In the nomination dossier, the present state of conservation of the Church of the Nativity is stated to be not good in terms of its roof and the potential for water ingress.

The ICOMOS Technical visit was undertaken to consider these specific aspects of the property.

Access was provided to the interior of the Church of the Nativity at floor level, and to the upper surfaces of the main roofs. The expert thus was able to get a close up view of some selective parts of the roof structure, and of the exterior of most parts of the church, as well as a partial view of the nave walls and of parts of the eastern apses.

The expert was also given access to recent technical reports on the state of conservation of the roof that have been undertaken in advance of a major programme of work to repair the roof (see below).

The expert observed that the roofs have been extensively patched with bituminous roofing felt, some recent, some older and now much decayed, none of which have had much effect in keeping out the rain. The expert considered that it is possible that some of the lead beneath the felt coverings could have slipped probably exposing areas of boarding beneath.

The expert also could see that rainwater management has not been realistically addressed by the original constructors or their successors: there are no eaves gutters to the upper roofs to protect the walls below; the aisle roofs have very narrow and shallow parapet gutters; and rainwater outlets are very undersized.

The timber roof structure appears essentially to be in the same condition as recorded in 1935 – certain damaged areas which appear in photographs of that date are still visible and only very minor works are reported to have been done since then.

From ground level many signs of water penetration were visible, though clearly most of these are of long standing. Some at ground level were possibly caused by water drawn up from below but also from washing of floors and the effects of condensation. The external ground level on the south side of the nave is well above internal floor level.

The expert noted that the Church is constantly very full of people. Two million visitors are recorded to have passed through the Church as tourists in the past year, and the queues to visit the grotto often require a wait in the church of several hours. The only doors into the church are very small, and not direct from the exterior but via the narthex, or the cloister; and the clearstory openings are not large. Consequently ventilation is poor and there are high levels of humidity, meaning that condensation must be a real issue in the colder seasons.

The technical expert considered that the problems facing the fabric of the Church are grave with water penetration continuing, but these conditions are of long standing. Detailed inspections and studies which have recently been carried out by an international consortium (see below) that has assessed the conditions in all parts of the fabric, using scaffolding to gain access to virtually all parts of the building.

If any areas had been considered by them to be under a threat of sudden loss, they would have ensured that temporary measures to secure them would have been taken while scaffolding was in place. Consequently from a technical point of view the technical expert did not consider that the present state of affairs could be described as an emergency.

The state of conservation of the monastic complexes is not known. The technical mission was not given access to these buildings.

#### Active Conservation measures

The nomination dossier makes clear that active measures to address the roof problems in the Church of the Nativity are about to start. What has held back conservation work has been the lack of collaboration between the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church and the Franciscan Order (something which has not happened for a thousand years). Now through a Presidential Decree, Palestine in cooperation with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate has jointly formed a Committee for the restoration of the Church. Surveys and assessments have already started and work will soon start.

The Committee has commissioned detailed reports and studies from a consortium of international professionals. The technical expert was shown two of these reports in draft and they appear to be comprehensive and detailed in their technical assessment of the situation and in their recommendations for the programme of work. They include analysis of the structure and its various components, including dendrochronology, non-invasive investigations, endoscopy, and core testing; they also include historical and archaeological analyses. The technical expert noted that only an analysis of the lead roof coverings and their supporting boarding seems to be missing.

The technical expert was told that it is the intention to use these documents as the basis for the appointment of professional and contractual teams to implement the roof restoration work, and that such a team could be in place within three months of authorization being given to proceed.

However the technical expert noted that a full Conservation Plan which analyses the detailed significance of various elements of the roof has so far not been undertaken. In the light of the fact that the roof appears not to have ever have been comprehensively repaired, and thus to have the potential for much historical evidence within the comparatively unaltered state of the majority of its fabric, ICOMOS considers that this would appear to be essential.

A Conservation Plan should underpin the roof restoration project. It would appear that such a Conservation Plan could be produced from the documentation already assembled; but it would need to be prepared by a qualified professional, rather than by a technical consortium.

Such a Plan could synthesis the conclusions of the detailed investigative reports into a clear statement of the significances of the various elements of the roof within a comprehensive conservation philosophy for the whole restoration project.

Active conservation work is reported to have been carried out on buildings alongside the Pilgrimage route and in Star Street in the Buffer Zone.

Between 1997 and 2000, Bethlehem was the focus of a major restoration project known as Bethlehem 2000. Over \$100 million was invested by more than a dozen countries, international organizations, including the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other donors, to refurbish buildings, restore archaeological sites, pave streets and squares, to rehabilitate water lines and sewage systems, and to develop tourism.

The nomination dossier does not make clear precisely what work was carried out on the nominated buildings as part of this project, apart from mentioning the extension to the Church of St Catherine and the restoration of the

School of St Jerome, part of the Armenian Convent – both mentioned under Description above.

#### Maintenance

The lack of proper maintenance over the past fifty years is acknowledged.

#### Effectiveness of conservation measures

ICOMOS has not been able to assess the effectiveness of the conservation measures across the property as a whole.

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ICOMOS considers that the adequacy of conservation and maintenance cannot be assessed at this stage.

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#### Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

There is no single management system for the property. The two main components of the nomination each has its own management objectives and arrangements. The Church of the Nativity is managed under the terms and provisions of the 'Status Quo' established by the Treaty of Berlin 1878, currently supplemented by an advisory committee formed by the Palestinian President. Each of the three adjacent Convents is maintained under its own arrangement: the Armenian Convent is controlled by the Armenian Patriarchate in the Holy City of Jerusalem; the Greek Orthodox Convent by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in the Holy City of Jerusalem; and the Franciscan Convent and the Church of St Catherine by the Custody of the Holy Land, Holy City of Jerusalem. The Pilgrimage Route, principally Star Street, is part of the Municipality of Bethlehem.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

There is no management plan for the property and no visitor management plan.

The Committee set up to oversee the roof repairs on the Church of the Nativity will be responsible for creating a conservation and management plan for the site.

An overall Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management Plan have been prepared. This aims to set effective cultural heritage preservation within the overall sustainable development of the area. The Plan was funded by the Government of Italy and it is stated that it is implemented by UNESCO in cooperation with MoTA, CCHP and the Municipalities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour.

The Charter on the Safeguarding of the Palestinian Historic Towns and Urban Landscapes – 'the Bethlehem Charter - 2008' and the Guidelines for the Conservation



and Rehabilitation of the Historic Towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, adopted respectively in December 2008 and March 2010, were prepared within the framework of the Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management Plan.

The Guidelines set out to analyse the urban landscapes of these towns and to set out principles for delivering the Bethlehem Charter. These are detailed and address the environmental, architectural, cultural and social assets of the area.

#### Risk preparedness

There are no details provided on risk preparedness.

#### Involvement of the local communities

No information is provided as to how local communities are actively involved in the property, although it is stated that they need to benefit from tourists visiting Bethlehem.

#### Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training

The sources of Finance for the Church of the Nativity come from the Presidential Treasury for the Restoration of the Roof of the Nativity, and are managed through the National Committee for the Restoration of the Roof of the Church of the Nativity.

Other funds come from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate for the Greek Orthodox Convent, the Custody of the Holy Land for Saint Catherine's Church and the Catholic Convent and from the Armenian Patriarchate for the Armenian Convent.

The level of financing for the three convents depends on the need for intervention to maintain, conserve, or restore a certain part of those convents, and the assessment of the consult engineer in charge.

The nomination dossier states that the Presidential fund has undertaken to prepare the assessment study for the Church of the Nativity, and implementing the conservation of the roof depending on the assessment, disregarding the cost because of the importance of such a monument.

#### Effectiveness of current management

ICOMOS has not been able to assess the effectiveness of the current management.

However it is clear that there are many challenges facing the property in terms of conservation and visitor management and in terms of managing development pressures in the buffer zone in order to conserve the highly important context of the Nativity Church.

From the information provided, it appears that considerable progress has been made in recent years in setting up the Presidential Committee and in the approval of Guidelines and General Rules for the

Protection of Historic areas and Buildings, Nevertheless formidable challenges remain. The pace of change is fast, the buildings need conservation and overall there is an urgent need to address how the Church of the Nativity and the historic centre of Bethlehem can move forward together.

Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management Plan that addresses the whole of the historic area is a great step forward. How it is to be implemented is not entirely clear. The Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation is said to be the implementing agency. No details are provided of its structure or resources.

In terms of the nominated property, there is clearly an urgent need address in particular the management of the immediate environs of the nominated area.

However it has to be acknowledged that the Bethlehem 2000 project – mentioned above – brought significant funds in to the town, a proportion of which were spent on restoring private buildings in the town and rehabilitating urban spaces.

ICOMOS considers that the management system for the property appears to need to be linked to the wider management of its surroundings in order to sustain the essential context of the Nativity Church. Further information is needed on how the management of the property is tied in to the wider management plan for Bethlehem and two other neighbouring towns.

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ICOMOS has not been able to assess the management arrangements.

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## 6 Monitoring

No indicators currently exist.

It is stated that the records collected as part of the Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management Plan will be updated and used as a basis for monitoring in the future. However these refer only to the town not the Church and monasteries.

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ICOMOS considers that adequate monitoring of the Church of the Nativity and monasteries is urgently needed.

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## 7 Emergency Nomination

This nomination is put forward as an Emergency Nomination under paragraph 161 and 162 of the *Operational Guidelines*. The justification for this is as follows:

- The Church of the Nativity and its monastic complex have greatly suffered from the lack of regular and

restoration works because of the political situation in the area and the region since 1967.

- Despite the efforts of the local religious authorities and the insistence of the international Community and particularly UNESCO which launched the ambitious programme called 'Bethlehem 2000' for the rehabilitation of the historic city and religious complex, no major restoration works were undertaken at the Nativity Church.
- As with other properties that suffered from the result of armed conflict, the property should be immediately inscribed on the World Heritage List in Danger.
- The lack of free movement imposed by the Israeli security forces is hampering the supply of appropriate materials.
- Overall the combined effects of the consequences of the Israeli occupation and the lack of scientific and technical measures for restoring and preserving the property are creating an emergency situation that should be addressed by an emergency measure.

Paragraph 161 of the *Operational Guidelines* states that emergency nominators procedures apply 'in the case of properties which, in the opinion of the relevant Advisory Bodies, would **unquestionably** meet the criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List and which have suffered damage or face serious and specific dangers from natural events or human activities'. The nomination needs to 'describe the nature of the emergency, including the nature and extent of the damage or danger and showing that immediate action by the Committee is necessary for the survival of the property'. The evaluation needs to assess Outstanding Universal Value, and the nature of the emergency, damage and/or danger.

In ICOMOS's view the Church of the Nativity and its surrounding monastic complex do have the capacity to be considered of demonstrating Outstanding Universal Value. However the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value have not been assessed, nor have considerations of integrity and authenticity, and no study has been made of the adequacies of the boundaries or of the requirements of protection and management.

In terms of threats, in ICOMOS's view, the Church of the Nativity has suffered from the lack of maintenance and the lack of conservation. As it acknowledged in the nomination dossier this has been partly to do with the lack of collaboration between the religious communities which have not been noted for their collaboration 'over the past thousand years'. As the management of the nominated buildings is shared between three religious organisations, collaboration between them is essential of progress is to be made with conservation and repair.

The main symptom of the lack of maintenance and conservation is the present state of conservation of the Church of the Nativity. As the Technical Expert

confirmed, although these are grave, they are also long-standing, and nothing that has been found during the recent extensive surveys of the roof undertaken by an international consortium has led them to conclude that the roof is in such danger that emergency measures such as scaffolding or other supports are needed.

The nomination dossier also makes clear that active measures to address the roof problems in the Church of the Nativity are about to start, based on the extensive recent studies and other progress has been made over the past few years. First and foremost this progress has been made possible by the Presidential Decree which has brought together the church authorities to such effect that a Committee has been set up to take forward repairs to the church roof which will be funded by the Palestine authorities. The vulnerability of the roof of the Church of the Nativity is now being addressed in the best way possible through the concerted efforts of the main parties.

In conclusion, ICOMOS does not consider that the property can be considered to have been severely damaged or to be under imminent threat.

ICOMOS does not consider that there is 'any immediate action' that could be taken by the Committee that 'is necessary for the survival of the property'.

## 8 Conclusions

ICOMOS considers that the nomination should be re-submitted for the normal assessment process and that this could provide the opportunity for a full assessment of the needs of the property in terms of protection, conservation and management.

ICOMOS further considers that although the current assessment has highlighted the need for work to be undertaken on the roof of the Church of the Nativity in the short term, it has also pointed up the need for this work to be guided by a Conservation Strategy that could synthesize the conclusions of the detailed investigative reports into a clear statement of the significances of the various elements within a comprehensive conservation philosophy for the proposed work.

What has also emerged is the need for better management of visitors, as the exceptionally high number of people within the Church of the Nativity at any one time is impacting adversely on its conservation of the fabric, and the provision of facilities for visitors are impacting adversely on the fabric of the surrounding town.

What further emerges from the nomination dossier is the very strong inter-relationship between the property and the historic city, a symbiotic relationship that has grown up since the time the first church was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. This relationship is threatened by inappropriate development and lack of control of traffic and tourism that is altogether impacting on the context of the churches in

terms of views, but perhaps more importantly their sense of place and their spiritual associations. The current nomination puts forward only the church and its monastic complex, with a small part of the pilgrimage route and an open area to the east.

ICOMOS considers that a revised nomination could allow consideration of these issues: of a Conservation Plan, wider boundaries, and visitor management, and of how the optimum supporting structures for the property might be put in place.

The State Party states that it is planning to nominate the Historic Town of Bethlehem as a second phase of a serial nomination, and that further phases would include the Historic Town of Beit Sahour, the Shepherds' Field, Beit Sahour, and the Mar Saba Monastery in the Desert to the east. The link between these sites will be their association with the story of the birth and life of Jesus.

In terms of a potential serial nomination, ICOMOS would like to draw attention to the requirements of the Operational guidelines as set out in paragraph 137:

*Component parts should reflect cultural, social or functional links over time that provide, where relevant, landscape, ecological, evolutionary or habitat connectivity.*

*Each component part should contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property as a whole in a substantial, scientific, readily defined and discernible way, and may include, inter alia, intangible attributes. The resulting Outstanding Universal Value should be easily understood and communicated.*

On the basis of information so far provided, ICOMOS does not consider that the proposal as put forward by the State Party for a serial nomination of places associated with the birth and life of Jesus would meet these conditions. The World Heritage Committee has indicated on several occasions that the link between component sites of a serial nomination should not be one person. ICOMOS thus suggests that this approach should be re-considered.

#### **Recommendations with respect to inscription**

ICOMOS does not consider that the conditions required by paragraph 161 of the *Operational Guidelines* are fully met, concerning damage or serious and specific dangers to the Church of the Nativity that make its condition an emergency that needs to be addressed by the World Heritage Committee with immediate action necessary for the survival of the property.

ICOMOS recommends that the Birthplace of Jesus: the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage route, Bethlehem, Palestine should not be inscribed on the World Heritage List on an emergency basis.

ICOMOS encourages the State Party to resubmit the nomination in accordance with normal procedures for nomination, to allow a proper assessment of integrity, authenticity, and conservation, and proper consideration

of management arrangements and of the appropriate boundaries for the property, in relation to its links with the surrounding town.

ICOMOS also recommends that the international community be encouraged to facilitate the conservation of the property.

ICOMOS further recommends, on the basis of the information so far provided, that this nomination should not be considered as being the first nomination of a serial property of sites that reflect the birth and life of Jesus and encourages the State Party re-consider this approach.

ICOMOS would be ready and willing to offer such support as may be appropriate, as part of the upstream advice processes.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



View of Manger Square towards the Church of the Nativity and its ensemble



Interior of the Church of the Nativity



The Cave of the Nativity



The Pilgrimage Route - Star Street