



State of Palestine

**State of Conservation Report for**

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



**Bethlehem, Palestine  
February 2016**

The State of Conservation Report (SOC) for the World Heritage Site (WHS) **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.

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## 1. Executive Summary

**Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines- Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir, Palestine (Ref. 1492) was inscribed on the World Heritage List on emergency on the basis of criteria (iv) and (v); and immediately on the List of World Heritage in Danger 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.**

The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value adopted by the World Heritage Committee (Decision 39 COM 8B.52) highlighted the negative impact of the planned separation barrier “wall” on the authenticity of the cultural landscape. The property and its features would be severely altered by the construction of a barrier and the service roads on each of its sides, as they would visually obstruct and physically disfigure much of the site’s landscape and terrace system.

This report presents the Desired State of Conservation (DSOCR) and the key Corrective Measures adopted by the World Heritage Committee (Decision 39COM7A.29) for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger. It also highlights the progress of implementation of key corrective measures by all related stakeholders.

The primary corrective measures are focused on extinguishing the imminent threat resulting from an Israeli plan to construct a “Wall” along the property, which would cause irreversible damage to its authenticity and integrity. Following the inscription of the property on World Heritage List during the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee, the Israeli High Court of Justice on 4 January 2015 decided to freeze the construction of the “Wall,” however that decision was made due to a lack of funds for 2015, and the state maintained their right to build the Wall in the future.

Although these developments are considered positive steps towards achieving permanent protection of the property, other factors are still threatening the quality of the landscape at a visual, ecological, socio-economic, and cultural level. Palestine is committed to implementing the corrective measures adopted by the World Heritage Committee (WHCom), especially those aiming to conserve the cultural landscape in line with international standards, prevent abandonment and forestation of existing agricultural terraces, engaging the local community with the WHS, and still committed to continue within human and financial recourses existed.

Realizing that a holistic Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) is a key to ensuring adequate respect and effective safeguarding of the property and its inherent Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the stakeholders are committed to proceed with preparation of the CMP for the site based on the guidelines prepared in the nomination file. Thus, in October 2015, Palestine requested an international assistance from the World Heritage Centre (WHC) for preparing the CMP.

Moreover, this report outlines main activities and projects undertaken throughout 2015 towards conserving the OUV of the property and removing it from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

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

## **2. Response from the State Party to the World Heritage Committee**

### **2.1 State of Conservation**

The desired state of conservation and corrective measures for the removal of the WHS from the Danger List has been adopted by the WHCom (Decision 39COM7A.29). The Desired State of Conservation responds to the presence of jeopardizing elements that justified the inscription of the site on the World Heritage in Danger list, and the factors that are affecting the property outlined in the nomination document.

The property is threatened by various external and internal circumstances that are disturbing the quality of the landscape at the visual, ecological, socio-economic and cultural levels. Palestine is committed to continuing to promote and implement the corrective measures adopted for this property, especially those aiming to conserve and manage the property in line with international standards.

### **2.2 Desired State of Conservation and Corrective Measures Developed for the Property**

#### **A. Desired State of Conservation**

- Dismissal of plans to build a “Wall” along the property, or within its surroundings,
- Adequate conservation of the agricultural terraces and their associated components, including watchtowers and dry stone walls throughout the property,
- Adequate restoration of the irrigation system and the development of a sufficient sewage system to protect water quality on the property,
- Protection methods in place for the property and its buffer zone,
- Adoption of a management plan and monitoring system, and a sustainable management structure in place.

#### **B. Corrective Measures**

- Agreement to dismiss plans to build a “Wall” along the property, or within its surroundings,
- Implementation of projects to restore an appropriate state of conservation for the agricultural terraces and their components, including the watchtowers and dry stone walls throughout the property,
- Implementation of a project to restore traditional irrigation systems,
- Implementation of a project to put in place an adequate sewage system to protect water quality on the property,
- Preparation, approval, and implementation of a Conservation and a Management Plan for the property,
- Development and implementation of an active system of management that involves local communities and stakeholders,
- Preparation of a set of indicators for monitoring the property and implementation of a monitoring system,
- Development of protection methods for the property and its buffer zone.

#### **C. Timeframe for implementation of the corrective measures.**

The following brief report explains the actions taken thus far by the stakeholders, as well as planned activities aiming toward achieving the desired state of conservation of the property.

### ***Status of dismissing the plans to build a “Wall” along the property, or within its surroundings.***

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 will be in accordance with Article 6, Section 3, of the World Heritage Convention (1972), which states, “*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.*”

### ***State of conservation of the property***

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

The CMP, which is being prepared, will take into consideration these factors and will 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.

To restore an appropriate state of conservation for the cultural landscape, the following are being prepared:

- A holistic Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the World Heritage Site, which sets the main management and conservation policies needed for successful conservation and protection of the WHS, as well as identifies the measures and programs that should be executed.
- Detailed specification for the actions that should be implemented in order to achieve the desired state of conservation and the key corrective measures.

Although, several restrictions and constrains 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, 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 (CMP) based on previous efforts of the village council and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

#### **Timeframe for implementation of the corrective measures.**

It will be set within the conservation and management plan that has been prepared by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and the Village Council of Battir.

### **3. Implemented and Future Actions to Secure the Conservation of the Property**

The 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 committed to safeguarding the cultural landscape, and they realize that it is their responsibility to develop the means to achieve that aim.

Since inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, progress towards achieving the 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, its Landscape Eco-museum, and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation, in addition to the local community at large, were aware of the threats that are affecting the landscape and were implementing strategies to face these threats before the inscription date.

In addition to these projects and activities that were mentioned in the nomination document, the following actions took place since the inscription; these actions are divided into four categories: (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) general 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 effects 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 4<sup>th</sup> January 2015, the Israeli High Court of Justice froze plans for the construction of the “Wall” along the property. This concluded a three-year 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-kilometer stretch of the “Wall”, and subsequently revealed that the plan was not a high security priority.



The 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 38<sup>th</sup> 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 enslaving 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.

### **3.2. Conservation of the Cultural Landscape**

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 and after the inscription of the property. Since the inscription of the property, several other projects were designated by the various stakeholders.

The local community in Battir has worked together on “Battir 2020”, a creative initiative that aims to implement sustainable cultural activities through setting up working domestic groups in various fields. These groups work on implementing awareness programs for the inhabitants about the world heritage site (WHS) and the importance of maintaining its Outstanding Universal Value.

In addition, the initiative is working on local community- funded projects aims to encourage the tourism and promote the WHS with close cooperation and support from Battir village council, MOTA, CCHP, UNESCO, and other stakeholders. The initiative is planning to increase the tourists visiting the village by 2020, within a very good quality of services.

The initiative has been established by the youth of the village, and has 50 participating young women and men.

During 2015 the following projects and activities were implemented in this category:

No.	Project	Completion date	Brief Description
1	<b>Battir 2020 Initiative</b>		Under Battir 2020 Initiative a lot of projects conserving the cultural landscape implemented, the projects funded by local community of Battir and implemented with technical support from MOTa, CCHP, and Battir village council.
	<b>a. Renovation of destroyed agricultural terraces</b>	October 2015	This project aims to revive the agricultural terraces migrated according to different factors, which also participate in preserving the cultural landscape. It maintained more than 150 m <sup>2</sup> of dry-stone terraces
	<b>b. Rehabilitation of traditional irrigation systems</b>	October 2015	This project included the maintenance of circa 240 meters of the water channels stretching between the spring of ‘Ain al-Balad to the irrigated fields.  This activity included ordinary and periodic maintenance implemented by the farmers.

The local community has also intensified the maintenance of the dry stone walls throughout the property. Several voluntary cleaning and maintenance campaigns were conducted by the village council and the local community during 2015.

### **WHV Camp, August 2015, Battir**

The 2020 Initiative and volunteers from the UNESCO Ramallah office joined the WHV camp and worked side by side with the local community of Battir to renovate walking terraces that go through the historical site using natural materials and tools that will not harm the environment or change the features of the ancient sites. They also worked on finishing tourist paths through the ancient terraces of the property and assisted the locals in promoting the site. Furthermore, they cleaned the 2000 year old pool and the Roman water canals to be reused.

The dumpsite, which was reclaimed in 2010, is currently recovering. Moreover, the Joint Service Council has increased the number of collection times of the solid waste from the containers, which shall contribute to eliminating garbage dumping in the open fields. The Joint Service Council is working on increasing the number of containers in

the village and equipping new vehicles for collecting solid waste, which shall enhance the efficiency of the process.

Several actions designed to ensure conservation of the property, and to enhance its various components are as the following:

No.	Project	Completion date	Brief Description
1	<b>Rehabilitation of ‘Ain al-Balad Spring</b>	October 2015	<p>The project aimed to rehabilitate the ‘Ain al-Balad spring and its surroundings; which is located in the buffer zone. The project included rehabilitation of the rest area and peripherals needed to enjoy the view.</p> <p><i>Funded by the Battir village council, and civil society organizations</i></p>
2	<b>Shops Renovation</b>	March 2016	<p>The project aims at transforming the abandoned shops located along the main street in Battir into touristic &amp; commercial stations that will improve the economic situation for the local community of Battir.</p> <p><i>Funded by Battir Village Council</i></p>

### 3.3. Enhancing the Physical Situation In and Around the WHS

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 be used as facilities to serve the property and enhance the socio-economic status of the local community.

During 2015 the following projects were implemented under this category:

No.	Project	Completion date	Brief Description
1	<b>Rehabilitation of the Battir Park Restaurant</b>	June 2015	<p>The project included rehabilitation of the Battir's Park Restaurant to improve the tourist services of the WHS.</p> <p><i>Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the West Bank Compete Project</i></p>
2	<b>Enhancement of several roads within the WHS and the village</b>	July 2015	<p>The project aimed to rehabilitate various streets in the WHS and the Battir village, including: the main street, the road that leads to the public park, and the rehabilitation of the public park and its parking lot.</p> <p><i>Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the West Bank Compete Project</i></p>
3	<b>Furnishing of Battir Old Street</b>	July 2015	<p>The project included building sidewalks, agricultural development, road surface marking, and installation of benches and signage in addition to lighting and landscaping of the Battir guesthouse.</p> <p><i>Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the West Bank Compete Project</i></p>
4	<b>Rehabilitation of Park Restaurant Street</b>	August 2015	<p>The project rehabilitated and increased the width of part of the street leading to the Park Restaurant.</p> <p><i>Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the West Bank Compete Project.</i></p>
5	<b>Renewing the main water supply network</b>	November 2015	<p>Replacing the main water supply network in the village of Battir.</p> <p><i>Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the West Bank Compete Project</i></p>

6	<b>Rehabilitation of Battir school</b>	March 2016	The project aims to enhance the socio-cultural status of the local community.  <i>Funded by the Battir Village Council</i>
7	<b>Battir Open Garden</b>	April 2016	The aim of the project is to enhance the tourist services inside the WHS, and to encourage tourists to extend their stay, enabling them enjoy the attractive view of the WHS from the open space created.

### 3.4. Conservation and Management of the Property

In order to achieve comprehensive CMP 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 and management plan, and a physical master plan for the land-use in the village.

For centuries, the conservation of cultural landscapes was in the hands of their inhabitants, who carefully maintained and used the landscape as their own resource. However, nowadays, the conservation of historical property requires highly specialised expertise to produce a set of effective tools that will enable the Palestinian national and local authorities to safeguard this outstanding landscape.

Initial efforts have been undertaken by the various stakeholders towards realizing a CMP 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 OUV of the property.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) and the village council are the two main institutions managing the WHS. In addition, there is a set of public and semi-governmental institutions associated with the management and conservation of the cultural landscape of Battir, including the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Environmental Quality, the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Endowment (Waqif), and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem

Actually, there are many challenges for implementing the (CMP). Mainly preparing the Plan needs various activities, such as carrying out comprehensive surveys, studies of the Site, all the above are steps that require specialized skills, efforts, qualified human resources and funding, so in October 2015, Palestine asked the WHC for an international assistance prepare a holistic management plan for WHS . This project will be implemented during 2016 (Depending on the fund).

### *Physical Master Plan*

Battir village council is working with the Ministry of Local Government for 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 intends to regulate land-use and building licenses within the village; the plan includes parts of the core and buffer zones of the WHS. This master plan is expected to be ratified by the end of this year.

#### **4. Future issues identified by the state party**

Future actions aim to address the threats mentioned by the World Heritage Committee (Decision 39 COM 7A.28), the proposed projects will assure the implementation of the corrective measures relating to protection of water quality for the WHS by installing an adequate sewage system as follows:

<b>No.</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Completion date</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
1	<b>Water Supply and Sanitation Improvements for West Bethlehem Villages Project</b>  <i>(Hussan, Nahhalin, Battir, Al-Walaja and Wadi Fukin)</i>	Pending funding	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Upon the completion of the feasibility study and conceptual design, Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) report shall be submitted to the World Heritage Centre before the implementation of the project.</p>
2	<b>Establishment of a sewage network.</b>	Pending funding	Proposed project to establish a sewage network

3	<b>Wastewater Treatment Plant for Battir and Hussan</b>	Pending advice of the World Heritage Committee and funding	<p>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.</p> <p>Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) report shall be submitted to the World Heritage Centre before the implementation of the project.</p> <p>The treatment plant shall contribute to resolving underground water pollution, which is causing severe damage to the springs and irrigated crops.</p>
4	<b>Renewing Water Distribution Networks</b>	2016-2017	<p>Renewing the secondary water distribution networks in the village.</p> <p><i>Funded by the World Bank and implemented in Cooperation with Ministry of Local Government.</i></p>
5	<b>Rehabilitation &amp; pavement of internal roads</b>	Pending funding	<p>The proposed project aims to rehabilitate internal roads in the village.</p>
6	<b>Agritourism and rehabilitation of the irrigation system</b>	Pending funding	<p>This proposed project aims at development of the agritourism product of Battir through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rehabilitation traditional building to extend the guest house;</li> <li>- Rehabilitation part of the irrigation system;</li> <li>- Development of the Homemade agricultural products</li> </ul> <p>The USAID committed to support this project during 2016. <i>The USAID is</i></p>

## **Ramallah UNESCO Office efforts**

The UNESCO Office in Ramallah has been actively involved in applying sustained security measures for the site as part of collective efforts for the safeguarding of the WHS. Several visits to the property and meetings with the Village Council and potential donors have taken place since the inscription of the site on the World Heritage List. These collaborative meetings reviewed and identified conservation and management challenges, proposed solutions, and integrated those solutions into comprehensive projects that advocated for the sustained safeguarding, rehabilitation, and promotion of the agro-cultural landscape. The work is being executed in cooperation with local and national stakeholders as well as relevant UN agencies which provide funding.

Moreover, the UNESCO Office in Ramallah has proposed a joint project titled, *“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 the UNDAF (*United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2014-2016*) for the State of Palestine, which has been approved by the 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 with the 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 potential donors.



## 5. 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.

Palestine conducted several projects during 2015 to protect the WHS and its OUV by maintained part of the agricultural terraces, conservation of parts of the traditional irrigation systems, rehabilitation for abandoned buildings and shops, enhancing the physical situation for the site and its surroundings, engaging the local community in the site by increasing the awareness and comprehensive activities conserving the WHS and promoting it.

However the WHS still needs an international assistance for preparation a holistic management plan for the property.

On the other hand the protection of water quality through establishing an environmental sewage system is still proposed without fund, and we are committed to solve this problem as soon as possible.

In spite of the considerable successful achievements and the efforts of various stakeholders in enhancing the state of conservation of the property and its settings to remove 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” on the List of World Heritage in Danger**

## 6. Appendices:



Restoration of Agricultural Terraces



Battir Irrigation Systems



Restoration for 'Ain al-Balad Spring and its Surroundings



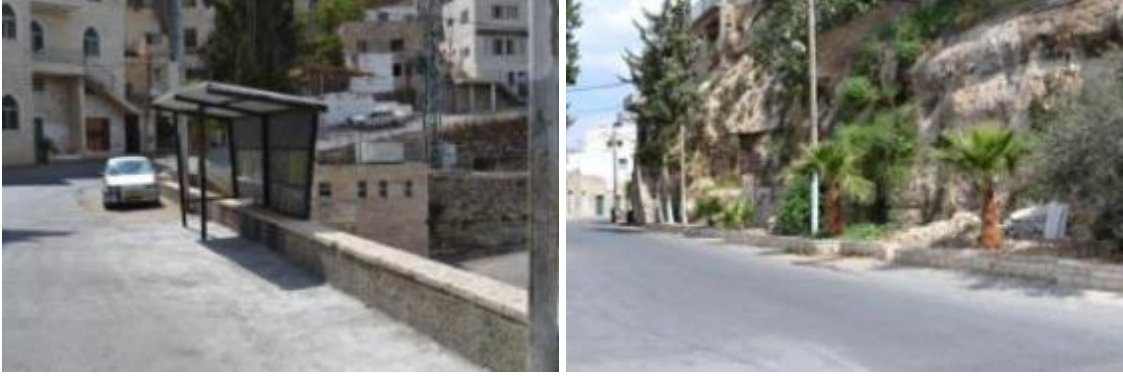
Rehabilitation of Old Building – Public Kitchen



Volunteer Work 2015



WHV Camp, August 2015, Battir, Palestine ©UNESCO



Street Furnishing Project



Rehabilitation of Battir Park Restaurant