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## Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir (Palestine) No 1492

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### Official name as proposed by the State Party

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

### Location

Palestine  
Bethlehem Governorate  
Bethlehem Western Rural Areas

### Emergency Nomination

The nomination was submitted by the State Party as an Emergency Nomination for the following reasons:

- The landscape has become vulnerable under the impact of socio-cultural and geo-political transformations that may bring irreversible damage to its authenticity and integrity;
- A plan to start the construction of a separation Wall could cut off farmers from fields they have cultivated for centuries.

In accordance with *Operational Guidelines*, paragraph 161, such nominations will be processed on an emergency basis, and their examination included in the agenda of the next Committee session, if:

- The property is in Danger, as a result of having suffered damage or facing serious and specific dangers from natural events or human activities, which would constitute an emergency situation;
- An immediate decision by the Committee is necessary to ensure its safeguarding;
- According to the report of the relevant Advisory Bodies, the property may unquestionably justify Outstanding Universal Value.

Accordingly, ICOMOS has set out in this report assessment of whether the property may be said to unquestionably justify OUV, whether it has suffered or is facing serious danger which constitutes an emergency situation, and whether an immediate decision by the Committee is necessary to ensure its safeguarding.

### Brief description

The Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir is nominated as a first site for a wider serial nomination of Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines.

The Battir landscape of gentle rolling hills encompass a series of agricultural valleys, *widian*, characterised by stone terraces, some irrigated for the production of vegetables, other drier ones planted with vines and olive trees, and yet others now abandoned.

Located some seven kilometres southwest of Jerusalem in the central highlands between Nablus in the north and Hebron in the south, the Battir landscape lies west of the mountain range that runs north to south parallel to the Mediterranean coast.

The nominated valleys encircle the village of Battir which is in the buffer zone. Near the village, springs have been channelled to provide irrigation, while away from the village are found considerable numbers of agricultural watch-towers known as *manatir*.

### Category of property

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

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (July 2013) paragraph 47, it is also a *cultural landscape*.

## 1 Basic data

### Included in the Tentative List

25 May 2012

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

None

### Date received by the World Heritage Centre

30 January 2014

### Background

This is a new nomination.

### Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committees on Cultural Landscapes and Archaeological Heritage Management and several independent experts.

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

On 20 February 2014, in order to update the information in the nomination dossier, ICOMOS requested the State Party to provide supplementary information on the following:

- Impact of possible World Heritage inscription
- Boundaries
- History
- Comparative Analysis
- Sustaining the cultural landscape

The State Party responded on 21 March 2014 and details of this response are included in this report.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

May 2014

## 2 The property

### Description

The property is located in the central highlands of Palestine, southwest of Jerusalem. A series of terraced agricultural valleys, *widian*, extend from Wadi AlMakhrou, west of Beit Jala, to the village of Husan, and encircle the village of Battir.

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Battir has been one of the main producers of vegetables for the central part of Palestine.

On the maps provided in the nomination dossier, three areas are shown to relate to the nomination: the area of the nominated property, the area of the buffer zone and a third area of irrigated fields that belong to the people of Battir.

The information provided in the nomination dossier is quite general and lacks specific information on the physical aspects of the landscape. Also some aspects such as intangible associations and details of sociocultural systems have been omitted. This makes a detailed description of its assets difficult. As the village is outside the nominated area, there is also a lack of focus on the interaction between people and the landscape.

The nomination dossier needs augmenting to allow a fuller understanding of the way the landscape has developed, precisely what survives, how it functions and how it is perceived.

### Terraces

Dry-stone terrace walls in Battir are the predominant characteristic of the whole landscape, and extend to around 554,000 metres. All are constructed of dry stone. Some are relict terraces where the lack of maintenance has led to their collapse and subsequent abandonment.

In terms of use, there are two types of terraces: those that are irrigated, and these are mainly around the village, and those that are dry and these are further away from the village.

All the irrigated terraces are fully functioning, mainly worked by women, and provide vegetable and fruit for the farmers. In contrast, 60% of the dry terraces are not cultivated and in various states of abandonment. Those that are cultivated mainly by men host olive trees and a few vines.

One of the key issue with this nomination is an area of irrigated fields that are owned by the people of Battir covering an area of 133.23 hectares and which are shown on the map of the nominated property.

### Irrigation

Near the village of Battir is a network of irrigation channels fed from ten underground springs. The water is collected in a retaining pool known as the Roman pool, and then shared equally between the eight families of the

villages, every eight days, by a traditional, equitable system using a stick to measure the depth of the pool. The distribution of the shares among the family members also rotates in order to avoid differences.

The irrigated fields are cultivated with fruit trees, such as almonds, apricots, and figs, and vegetables, mostly now for subsistence, although the famous Battiri aubergine attracts buyers from outside the area. Battir used to be the garden for Jerusalem, before it was cut off from this market in 1967.

### Olive tree cultivation

The un-irrigated terraces that form the majority are planted with olive trees and vines. Although some olive trees are said to be ancient, or even Roman, most may not be as old as claimed. The term Roman might refer to the method and continuity of the cultivation. Remains of 'ancient' stone olive presses, which could date back several centuries, testify to the continuity of this crop.

During the harvest season from October to November, traditionally the whole family would leave their houses in the village, and move to the agricultural watchtowers (*manatir*) in the hills. Today harvesting is still a family occupation but with the families augmented with people brought in from the towns.

Vines are no longer cultivated on as large a scale as they once were and appear to be more a testimony to the past than a real income for the population.

The terraces were traditionally shaded by Palestine oaks. Most of these appear to have been over cut. On the more distant slopes from the village are spruce and pine trees, planted during the British occupation, and now expanding to colonise abandoned terraces.

### Vernacular buildings

The main manifestations of vernacular buildings within the property are the stone watchtowers, *manatir*. These were built for the protection of farm land away from the village. Around 230 watchtowers have been documented in the property of varying shapes and sizes, built in both dressed and rubble stone. Some were formerly used by farm labourers employed by wealthy landlords, while many others were inhabited during the harvest season as temporary houses. Most are now unused and in various stages of conservation and repair, with a few little more than ruins.

Although it is stated that many agricultural watchtowers are presumed to have existed from late prehistory into the early historical periods (the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennia BC), modern archaeological and survey work has not substantiated that general link.

A few limekilns survive in the property, constructed to burn the local limestone for use as building mortar. All are now abandoned.

The remaining vernacular buildings are in the old part of Battir village and within the proposed buffer zone. The village has grown rapidly in recent decades and is now surrounded by a 'sprawl town' and many older houses have been rebuilt or extensively altered. The State Party acknowledges that the recent growth impacts negatively on the visual continuity of the landscape. They do also acknowledge though the importance of the older village and state that once a conservation and management plan has been drawn up for it, it could perhaps be considered as an extension.

### **History and development**

A few archaeological excavations and surveys have revealed slight remains related to the Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age and Iron Age, while pottery shards have been dated to the late Iron Age, the Persian Period and the Hellenistic Period.

During the Roman period, Battir was located along the main road connecting the port city of Gaza with Jerusalem, although the village was in a slightly different location from that of present day Battir. Remains of a fortification wall in Khirbet Al-Yahoud have been found, the construction and shape of which appear to date back to the Roman Period.

In 2007, remains of a human settlement, including some agricultural tools, were found dating from the Caliphate Period 636 AD to 661 AD. This excavation also suggested that the landscape had been used continually since that date.

In the Ottoman period there is a written record that mentions farmers growing wheat and barley.

The State Party acknowledges that further research and study is needed not only for the Battir landscape but also more widely for other Palestinian landscapes.

It is the more recent history that has dramatically reshaped the landscape. Under the British mandate, 1917 to 1948 Battir became the last stop along the Jaffa - Jerusalem railway, which led to close economic ties with Jerusalem.

Then under the Jordanian mandate and the Rhodes Armistice Agreements of 1949, Battir was cut off from Jerusalem (along the line of the railway track) that separated Israel from the West Bank.

The name West Bank refers to land west of the River Jordan.

## **3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity**

### **Comparative analysis**

The brief comparative analysis only compares the property to four already inscribed properties, Cultural Landscape of the Serra de Tramuntana, Spain, the

Cultural Landscape of Bali Province: the *Subak* System as a Manifestation of the *Tri Hita Karana* Philosophy, Indonesia, the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, the Philippines, and the Cultural Sites of Al Ain (Hafit, Hili, Bidaa Bint Saud and Oases Areas), UAE.

Terraced landscapes are found in most parts of the world and the rationale for the choice of these four properties is not set out.

The analysis concludes by observing that The Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir is considered unique in three major aspects: first, that the landscape depends on cultivating a variety of crops within its manmade dry-stone terraces; second, is the distinctive architecture of the dry-stone agricultural watchtowers, built for protection of the terraces; and third, is the uniqueness and survival of the tradition of using a democratic irrigation method.

The attributes of the Battir landscape – agricultural terraces, the use of spring fed irrigation and the presence of watch towers are in fact not unique but rather widespread around the Mediterranean Sea (and the State Party does acknowledge that the irrigation system of Battir is part of this wider Mediterranean system). Especially notable examples are found for instance in Greece, Italy, Spain and the Canary islands as well as in Syria and Lebanon. Terraced landscapes have recently attracted academic interest for their biodiversity as well as cultural interest and extensive papers have been produced.

Also comparatively well studied are the watch towers which are prevalent in many countries around the Mediterranean. The ones around Battir appear to be similar to those on other areas of Palestine.

What is missing from the comparative analysis are comparisons between the Battir landscape and the many other terraced landscapes of the Eastern and wider Mediterranean area, and also between Battir and other landscapes of Palestine, particularly those of the Judean Hills. Currently there is thus very little basis for determining why the Battir terraced landscape should be considered exceptional in the Mediterranean context or even in the Eastern Mediterranean context. Battir might be exceptional within Palestine, although its relationship to other terraced landscapes of the Judean hills need justifying, but what needs to be demonstrated is how its exceptionality extends beyond national boundaries.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis currently does not justify consideration of this property for the World Heritage List and needs amplifying.

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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:

- The terraces bear witness to thousands of years of human activity;
- The continuous settlements around springs from at least the Bronze Age (over 4,000 years);
- Clear evidence of settlement over thousands of years;
- The terraces, irrigation system, and pools were an important milestone in agricultural activity of the area and have been in continuous use since Roman times;
- Battir was on the Roman route from Gaza to Jerusalem;
- Olive trees are part of Palestinian identity.

ICOMOS considers that although it has been shown that there were a few pre-historic settlements in the vicinity of the property, that the name Battir might be associated with the biblical village of Bethar, that a Roman road ran near the property and that the current Battir could have emerged during the Ottoman period, the idea of a continuous and persistent settlement of these valleys cannot be sustained.

The terraces might have ancient origins but these have yet to be proved, and on the basis of current knowledge, it cannot be said that they have persisted since Roman times. There is some evidence for Roman terraces and water management techniques in the land of the former Roman Empire but the majority of the larger-scale activities appear to have fallen out of use after the demise of the Empire. Some lay abandoned such as in Syria, while others were partially revised in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was not until around the 12<sup>th</sup> century that water management appears to have been actively reorganised. The situation in and around Battir is unclear. Without further survey and research it remains unknown whether the settlement of Battir and its associated terraces and water management system have persisted for centuries, or have been largely developed in the past few centuries.

Although the justification for OUV concentrates on the historical importance of the property, the comparative analysis focuses on considering the Battir landscape as exceptional for its current form; this physical exceptionality has also not been demonstrated.

As stated above, the Battir cultural landscape might be exceptional within Palestine and a landscape that deserves protection for its national value, but what has not been demonstrated is how it might be considered to be of Outstanding Universal Value.

### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

In terms of the boundaries, integrity is compromised through the exclusion of Battir village from the nominated area. The village is where farmers live and it thus contributes to the overall cultural coherence of the

property. Perhaps more fundamentally the integrity of the overall landscape is compromised by the fact that a sizable proportion of the lower irrigated fields are not included in the nominated area.

Although the nomination asserts that local farmers still use traditional agricultural practices, the vulnerabilities of this system are acknowledged, notwithstanding the commitment of the local community. The external factors impacting on these traditional practices are the potential construction of the separation Wall/Fence and settlements, the implementation of plans that would contribute to preserving the property, such as sewage and water network that would prevent the loss and contamination of the spring water, and of control of development around the village. These factors threaten, both directly and indirectly, the sustainability and integrity of this cultural landscape.

#### **Authenticity**

The nomination dossier acknowledges the impact of socio-cultural and geo-political changes on the authenticity of the property. These relate to constraints in repairing physical features of the landscape, the decline in the number of farmers, and the limited market for produce. Although the families continue with traditional irrigation practices in the lower terraces, the higher dry terraces are threatened by increasing neglect and afforestation. The construction of the Fence could impact further on the ability of farmers to continue farming their lands and thus on the overall sustainability and authenticity of the cultural systems reflected in the landscape.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have not currently been met and both are currently highly vulnerable.

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

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

*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 property is an outstanding example of a landscape that illustrates the development of human settlements near water sources. The village of Battir, which developed on the outskirts of this cultural landscape, and was inhabited by farmers who worked and still work the land, attests to the sustainability of this system and to its continuation for the past 4,000 years. A system of irrigation permitted the development of agricultural terraces in a very steep mountainous landscape fed by a complex irrigation system that is managed by the eight main families inhabiting the village. The methods used to construct the terraces illustrate significant stages in human history, and the ancient

system of canals, still in use today, dates back to ancient times.

ICOMOS considers that the development of settlement near water sources is an almost universal phenomenon and the choice of the site of Battir village does not appear to be outstanding. Although the nomination dossier states that there is a very long association between people and the environment in and around Battir, the evidence for continuous settlement over 4,000 years has not been put forward. Nor has the ancient history of the terraces and the irrigation system been confirmed by archaeology or documentation. The terraces and their associated irrigation system are of a type that is widespread around the Mediterranean basin. Much more research and analysis would be needed if they were to be considered exceptional in wider than a Palestinian context.

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ICOMOS does not consider that this criterion has been met.

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Criterion (v): *be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the strategic location of the property and the availability of springs were two major factors that attracted people to settle in the area and adapted its steep landscape into arable land.

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Battir has been one of the main producers of vegetable products for the central part of Palestine. The property is an outstanding example of traditional land use, which is representative of thousands of years of culture and human interaction with the environment.

This human-made landscape has become vulnerable under the impact of socio-cultural and geo-political transformations that may cause irreversible damage. The agricultural practices that were used to create this living landscape embody one of the oldest farming methods known to humankind and are an important source of livelihood for local communities.

As set out in relation to criterion (iv), ICOMOS considers that the thousands of years of human interaction with the environment has not been demonstrated other than in general way. Many landscapes around the world have such time depth, but not necessarily continuous development or the persistence of traditions. What is needed for the Battir landscape is a much clearer understanding of the way it has developed and particularly the chronological development of its terracing and irrigation system. At the same time a more detailed comparative analysis is needed to allow the Battir landscape to be understood in relation to other similar

landscapes around the Mediterranean, in order to ascertain whether it might be seen as exceptional in a wider than Palestinian context.

Although the Battir landscape is vulnerable, that on its own is not sufficient to satisfy this criterion.

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ICOMOS does not consider that this criterion has been met.

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#### **Conclusion on Outstanding Universal Value**

ICOMOS does not consider that the Cultural Landscape of Battir can be said to unquestionably justify OUV.

## **4 Protection and management**

### **Protection and management system**

The focus of the nomination dossier has been to set out a case for the impact of the Fence in visual terms and on the management of the irrigated fields. The implication is that if these threats are removed, the property would be able to carry on as before.

The nomination dossier provides very little information on management and protection of the cultural landscape. In terms of protection, it appears that within the nominated property only archaeological sites and the ruins of human settlements are provided with legal protection. The dossier acknowledges that there is an absence of governmental policy regarding sustainable landscape planning, environmental protection, and sustainable development, which has resulted in uncontrolled urban expansion and solid waste, and water, air and soil pollution.

There is no management plan for the property and no management system is outlined. A Battir Conservation and Management Plan is being developed. An outline is included in the nomination dossier. This sets out clearly necessary aims and policies that are needed to strengthen community engagement promote pro-active management and optimise opportunities for sustainable development. The Plan will however not be completed within the next few months.

### **Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone**

The nominated area does not include all fields that are part of the irrigation system focused on Battir. This has profound implications for the integrity of the property and for its manageability.

The buffer zone is primarily to the north, north-west, east, south and western sides of the property. It extends to the village of Al-Walaja to the northeast, the towns of Beit Jala and Al-Khader to the east, and the village of Husan to the south. To the north-east of the property, there is a ten metre wide strip. As well as the village of Battir, the buffer zone consists in part of abandoned terraces with

watch towers, and in part of terraces still in agricultural use.

The buffer zone is limited in terms of its protection as it does not include a key area exposed to the risk of establishment of a large settlement on the nearby hills of Al-Walajah. The rationale for the buffer zone delineation is not clear, nor the protective effect that it might have.

## 5 Emergency threats affecting the property

The State Party puts forward two emergency threats:

- The landscape has become vulnerable under the impact of socio-cultural and geo-political transformations that may bring irreversible damage to its authenticity and integrity,
- A plan to start the construction of a separation Wall could cut off farmers from fields they have cultivated for centuries.

### Emergency threats

Proposed construction of a separation Fence (Wall)

The Battir cultural landscape and the way it functions has been impacted upon over the past 65 years by external geo-political forces that have led to divisions and regulatory Areas being imposed upon it that bear little relation to its socio-cultural units.

The main potential threat to the property is a plan by Israeli authorities to construct a physical barrier. This would prohibit access by Battir farmers to their lands beyond the railway line.

Whether the portion of the barrier that would cut off Battir lands will be constructed is still being debated by the Israeli High Court.

In December 2012, the Battir villages petitioned the Israeli High Court, with the support of the Israel National Parks and Friends of the Earth Middle East, to have the barrier re-routed beyond their land. The Israeli National Parks stated that 'the building of the fence (separation barrier) as currently proposed by the respondents (a 3.5 metre high bolstered metal fence along a 500 metre segment) does not adequately balance, as required, the range of conflicting interests, and does not adequately address the wide and irreversible damage that will be caused to the natural landscape, and heritage values that exist in the area'.

A temporary injunction was issued in May 2013 to stop the barrier from proceeding. A further Court hearing took place on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014, when it was confirmed that the barrier would be a Fence rather than a Wall. The Court requested further clarification from the Israeli Railways and the Ministry of Transport, including whether gated access for farmers could be provided. The extra information was requested by 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014. At the

time of writing, a final decision by the Court remains pending.

If the barrier were to be constructed it could have physical impact beyond the line of the Fence on the railway tracks, as the security zone on either side could mean that the land appropriated extended to between 50 and 90 metres in width. Its construction might also impact severely on natural water drainage as well as on the traditional irrigation channels.

According to the State Party, experts remain divided as to whether the Fence and its associated security zones could be constructed without destroying terraces and in a way that allowed the flow of irrigation water to pass underneath. Even if both of these were possible, it is difficult to see how farmers would be allowed the flexible access necessary to moderate their water supplies in land on the Israeli side of the Fence.

Proposed construction of new Israeli settlements

High-rise Israeli settlements have been constructed over the crest of the surrounding hills in some specific areas, such as beyond the south-east of the buffer zone. The potential impact is not possible to assess.

Impact of socio-cultural and geo-political change

In the nomination dossier the State Party acknowledges that the cultural landscape has already become vulnerable under the impact of socio-cultural and geopolitical change that may bring irreversible damage to its authenticity and integrity.

These changes are multi-faceted but relate to the movement of people to the towns as well as the much restricted market for agricultural produce, and to the lack of repair and maintenance of the terraces.

### Other threats

Afforestation

As a result of the abandonment of cultivation terraces and the loss of dry stone walls, spruce and pine trees species have begun to colonise some of the slopes in the property. If this process continues uncontrolled, it will severely impact on the character of the property, with an open terraced landscape being transformed into one of trees and associated scrub.

The State Party claims they are not allowed to cultivate these lands and there is the concomitant implication that these lands could be confiscated.

If confirmed, a combination of extended tree cover and confiscated lands would have an immense, severe and probably irreversible impact on the cultural landscape in visual and socio-economic terms. The loss of terraces could hasten erosion and also encourage the loss of native species such as the Palestine oak (*Quercus calliprinos*).

#### Lack of sewage system

No sewage system exists and it is stated that the Palestinians are not allowed to construct one. The current system is based on septic tanks and/or cesspits and there are concerns that these could in the future pollute the ground water if untreated sewage flows unchecked into the *wadis*.

#### Solid Waste Management

There is no efficient solid waste management in the property with the result that there are waste dumps near the agricultural terraces. However there is a new plan for solid waste management for the whole of the Bethlehem Governorate with a new landfill site at Al-Maniya that is already working.

#### Loss of water

Water for domestic use is being lost due to lack of maintenance. The State Party claims that they have been denied authorisation to build new reservoirs and a whole new system for domestic use.

#### Impact of threats

The construction of a separation Fence could radically impact on the overall morphology of the Battir landscape in visual terms and also potentially on hydrology, irrigation and the livelihoods of the farming community.

At the present time no decision has been made on whether the Fence will be constructed along the line of the railway and if so whether access for farmers and water necessary to irrigate fields on the Israeli side of the Fence will be allowed.

Furthermore no timetable is known for when a decision might be made.

In visual terms, a 3.5 metre high fence with wire above would create a highly visible and highly damaging divide across the valley landscape. ICOMOS considers that although the visual impact of the fence would be highly negative, it might be reversed with the removal of the structure at some point in the future, but whether or not this were possible without irreversible damage would depend on the methods of construction and the extent of the interventions to the terraces.

However socio-economic impacts might not be reversible. If the Fence did not allow adequate access for farmers and water, it could also impact severely on farmers' livelihoods through the loss of part of their irrigated land and would thus exacerbate the already vulnerable subsistence farming in the nominated area (see below). The landscape of fields on the Israeli side of the Fence will only survive as an irrigated terraced landscape, if there is sufficient permeability in the Fence to allow for farmers and water to access the fields to allow for control of water. The contention is made in the nomination dossier that the loss of the irrigated fields

beyond the Fence could mean that farmers no longer had a sustainable agricultural unit on the Palestinian side. It must be recalled however that the land beyond the Fence is not within Palestine and thus not part of the nominated property.

The Fence is not the only threat to the property. There are three other threats, all inter-related: shrinking population of farmers, abandonment of terraces and associated colonisation by non-indigenous tree species, as well as potential pollution of water supplies.

Although the absence of a Fence, or its re-alignment beyond the irrigated fields in the valley, or a Fence with satisfactory access for farmers would allow farmers to continue to farm their irrigated fields, there remains a great threat to the sustainability of the rest of the terraced landscape, particularly the dry terraces.

Many hectares of dry terraces have been abandoned or are only lightly farmed. Once cultivation ceases, repair of the terraces also ceases and erosion can set in quickly. Good soil gets washed out and trees and scrub begin to colonise the uncultivated land. Although there have been projects to revive terraces and repair broken down walls, the extent of terraces – some 500 km – within the nominated property means that the task of keeping the terraces farmed is far beyond the resources of the eight families who now farm the area. There is also the apparent further potential threat of confiscation of plots that are not farmed over a 3-4 year period under an Absentee Law.

ICOMOS considers that the robustness of the cultural landscape to respond to these threats is currently low. Although the eight farming families are highly committed to their landscape they are not working within a strong supportive framework. There is no adequate legal protection, insufficient support from national government, no subsidies for the revival of traditional practices, and inadequate markets for extra production. (See below for further details.) What the nomination dossier does not set out at all clearly is how the robustness of the traditional systems and practices could be strengthened.

Although the traditional village of Battir is an integral part of the cultural landscape, it has been overwhelmed by new development and is now no longer just a farming community. Its size is now putting a strain on services such as the water supply and sewage systems which cannot be improved, and which could easily impair the water supplies on which the farming system depends. This disjunction between the growth of the non-farming community and the decline of the farming community needs to be addressed urgently if the traditional irrigation system is to survive.

#### Potential Emergency

The Fence would create a highly undesirable visual intrusion into the landscape, albeit one that might be reversed at some point in the future if its construction did

not irreversibly impact on the terraces of the nominated area.

If permission is given for a Fence along the railway with no adequate passage for farmers and water, then the irrigated fields on the Israeli side of the Fence would probably be abandoned. This could have a highly negative impact on the livelihood of the eight farming families as they might not have sufficient irrigated fields on the Palestinian side for a sustainable livelihood.

Even without the issue of the Fence, there are growing threats to the dry terraces in the property from a range of less dramatic causes but with equally serious implications related to abandonment of farm land and afforestation, which over time could become dramatic and irreversible.

These threats are potential dangers to the property. The issue is whether these dangers might be considered as an emergency for which a decision by the Committee would ensure its safeguarding.

The Fence would be constructed outside the nominated property and would impact on land that is also outside the nominated property.

Many cultural landscapes extend across political boundaries and it is not always possible to protect an entire geo-cultural landscape unless there is a transnational nomination. This nomination is only for land currently within Palestinian territory.

The definition of an emergency in the nominated area could not in ICOMOS's view allow the World Heritage Committee to take actions that might influence the actions of a State Party not associated with the property. Accordingly ICOMOS questions whether a decision of the Committee could ensure the safeguarding of the property in terms of mitigating the impact of the Fence.

As for ways of mitigating longer term threats associated with abandonment and afforestation, these are also not susceptible to immediate safeguarding by a decision of the Committee, but need sustained interventions within a framework of a fully developed Management Plan.

#### **Conclusion on Emergency**

ICOMOS does not consider that the Dangers facing the property can be considered to constitute an Emergency situation for which a decision by the Committee is necessary for its safeguarding.

## **6 Conclusions**

In response to the requirements of Emergency Nominations as set out in *Operational Guidelines*, paragraph 161, ICOMOS has considered whether:

- The property is in Danger, as a result of having suffered damage or facing serious and specific dangers from natural events or human activities, which would constitute an emergency situation;
- An immediate decision by the Committee is necessary to ensure its safeguarding;
- According to the report of the relevant Advisory Bodies, the property may unquestionably justify Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS's conclusions are as follows.

A case has not been made for the property unquestionably justifying Outstanding Universal Value. In the absence of detailed survey, research and comparative analysis, a case has not been made for the property having greater than national value.

The main potential threats to the property are the construction of a Fence, and the abandonment of terraces and afforestation. ICOMOS considers that these threats do constitute potential dangers to the cultural value of the property.

However, as the threat of construction of a Fence arises outside the nominated area, ICOMOS questions whether the potential danger arising from the visual and socio-economic impacts of the Fence constitutes an Emergency as ICOMOS considers an immediate decision by the World Heritage Committee might not ensure its safeguarding through forestalling such a threat or reversing it, if it became a reality.

The nominated property does not only face this one threat: it is also highly vulnerable to the abandonment of terraces and the spread of afforestation, as well as to a wide range of socio-economic factors and political constraints. These threats could also in time endanger the property.

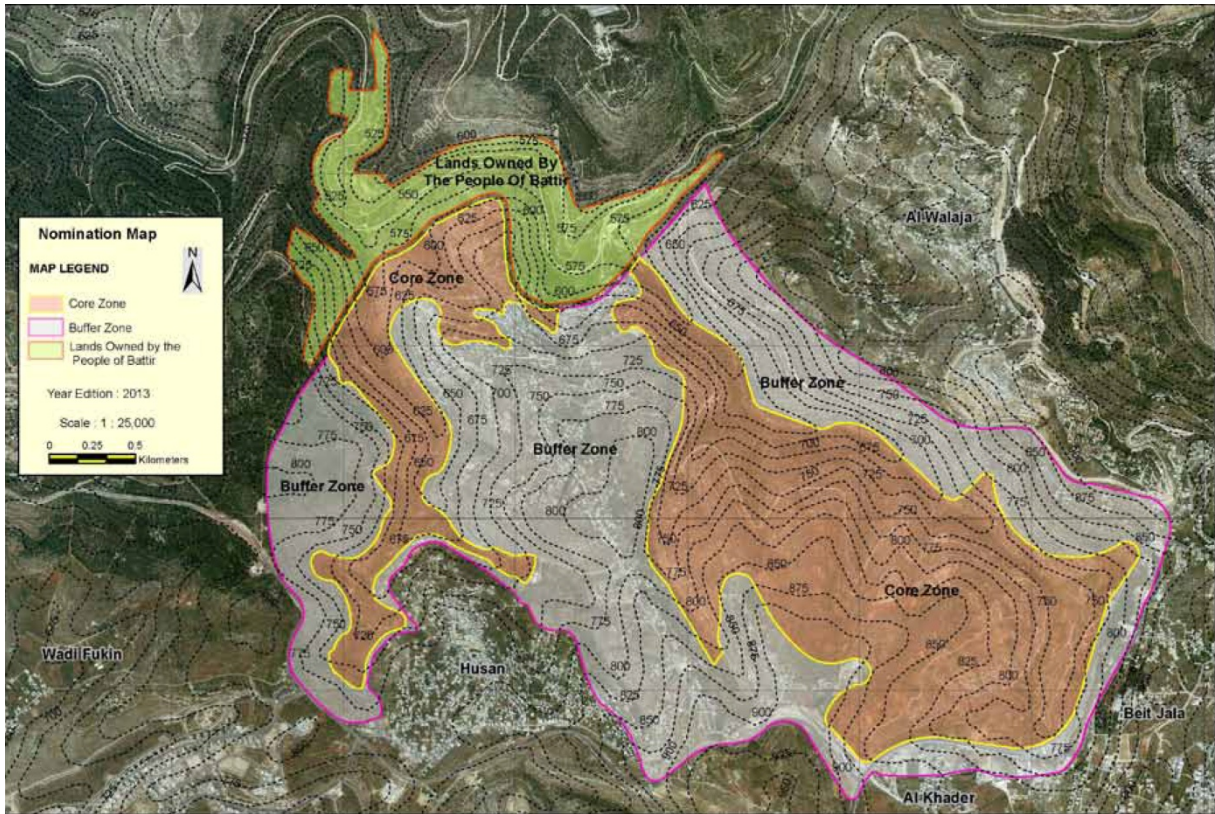
ICOMOS also considers that these longer term threats cannot be considered to constitute an emergency for which a decision of the World Heritage Committee could have an immediate impact to ensure the safeguarding of the property. The reversal of the conditions that support these negative changes will only be achieved through sustained interventions at a local level, through an active management plan and with the full engagement of local communities, and local and national authorities.



## **7 Recommendations**

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

ICOMOS does not consider that the present nomination of Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir, Palestine, is unquestionably of Outstanding Universal Value; and, while several threats have been identified for this property, ICOMOS has not found that it faces an emergency for which an immediate decision by the World Heritage Committee could ensure its safeguarding.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Terraced landscape



Agricultural watchtowers



Remains of 'ancient' stone olive presses



Retaining pool known as the Roman pool