

State of Palestine



State of Conservation report for Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem

Ref. 1433, Palestine

Bethlehem, Palestine

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Follow the links (<http://cdgcloud.com/cloud/index.php/s/MRw40Ahr9wuEh0C>) and to see the annexes listed below:

Annex no.1: Restoration of the Church of the Nativity-Bethlehem Progress Report #55

Annex no.2: Brief Construction Progress Report /September15, 2013 - December 31, 2017

Annex no.3: Draft of the Conservation Management Plan for the World Heritage Site. Please follow the following link <https://we.tl/t5Zsjsu5LOt>

Annex no.4: Transport and Mobility Master Plan for Bethlehem Governorate- phase I- Data Collection.

The World Heritage Site, “Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem” (Ref. 1433) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2012 following an emergency nomination, in accordance with criteria (iv) and (vi); and immediately on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to the lack of repair of the roof structure of the Church of the Nativity and the consequent threat to the roof timbers, roof covering, and the interior wall surfaces from water ingress.

In response to the World Heritage Committee decision (41 COM 7A.42), Bethlehem Municipality prepared the State of Conservation Report for the World Heritage Site, ***Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the pilgrimage Route***, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

1 Executive Summary

As a result, for the ongoing restoration program that has been started since September, 2013 at the Church of the Nativity, the roof of the Church of the Nativity was successfully completed in April, 2016 while additional items were added to the works and completed based on a list of priorities and according to the final study recommendations and available funds, these works included: restoration and consolidation of the Narthex cross vaults, the Narthex eastern wooden door, restoration of all external stone facades, consolidation of the internal wall plastering, wall mosaics, Basilica metal doors, wooden architraves and installation of the electrical system “lighting and smoke detection system”.

During 2017, the Palestinian Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity completed restoration of all the external stone facades in October 2017, as well as the installation of the electrical system lighting and smoke detection system completed in December, 2017.

Currently, the restoration works are progressing with the authorized works based on available funds which include: restoration of additional nineteen columns in the central nave of the Basilica out 50 columns, which are expected to be completed by the end of March, 2018. (Annex no.1)

It is worth mentioning that the four corrective measures set for the site have been completed, the fourth one which is related to the development of the conservation plan for the Church of the Nativity was drafted and submitted last year.

The various local stakeholders involved in the Property, namely the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Bethlehem Municipality, The Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation, devoted all their efforts to develop the final draft of the Conservation Management Plan for the entire Site, which has been completed during January, 2018 and shall be submitted to the World Heritage Committee for review. Once approved by the Committee and adopted by the local stakeholders, it will become an official tool to manage the entire World Heritage property.

It is worth noting that the Conservation Management Plan was requested by the World Heritage Committee (Decision 41 COM 7A.42), as a tool to conserve the significant attributes of the Outstanding Universal Values of the Site and create a smooth liaison between all the stakeholders involved in managing the Site (Annex no.3).

Concerning the rehabilitation of the Star Street and branches, a great progress was made in finalizing the design phase in line with the vision of Bethlehem Municipality and its partners, which revolves around reviving the Street, by attracting the inhabitants and the shop owners of the Street to reopen and activate

their abandoned properties in order to accommodate the needs of the inhabitants, the pilgrims and the visitors.

The design phase provided facilities and services for the Street users, such as traffic flow management in the Historic Centre, as well as providing parking lots in the immediate vicinity as a step towards freeing the Street from the vehicles and managing the traffic, while promoting pedestrian movement. The design created a drop off point at the northern end of the Street to attract both visitors and pilgrims to walk down the Pilgrimage Route on their way to the Church of the Nativity. The design also offered an adequate route for vehicles to evacuate away from the Historic Centre of Bethlehem and flow towards the Manager Street.

For what concerns the proposed project; “the Manger Square Tunnel”, which is nominated to address the urban pressure and the traffic congestion within the Historic Centre of Bethlehem. The State Party has declared to act according to the World Heritage Committee decision no. (41 COM 7A.42), to postpone any progress until the completion of the second phase of the “Transport and Mobility Master Plan for the Bethlehem Governorate” (Annex no.4), which shall address all the negative aspects related to the traffic congestions in the city and will tackle the road network, the public transport system, the development of a parking strategy, and the management of pedestrian traffic. This phase is expected to be finished in January 2019. While the other proposed project “the Manger Square Village” has been cancelled due to its huge scale in such a critical area, as it may affect adversely on the authenticity and the integrity of the Site, as well the consequent threats on reviving the Star Street through attracting the flow of pilgrims, visitors and locals to the proposed project, which shall be vibrant with diverse activities in addition to its adverse impact on the traffic flow in the Historic Centre.

Thus, **the State of Palestine is requesting the World Heritage Committee to remove the Property from the List of World Heritage in Danger**, after the successful completion of the restoration works at the Church of the Nativity as well as completing the corrective measures set for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger and the completion of the final draft of the required Conservation Management Plan for the entire World Heritage Site.

2 Response from the State party to the World Heritage Committee Decision: 41COM7A.42

2.1 *The conservation plan for the Church of the Nativity*

A great progress was made in relation to the Conservation Plan for the Church of the Nativity, which was submitted to the World Heritage Committee in November, 2016 created and developed according to the recommendations of the ICOMOS Expert after his visit to the World Heritage Site in September, 2016.

The diverse restoration tasks within the restoration program at the Church of the Nativity are progressing in a good manner and according to the available funds, such as the completion of the restoration of the external stone facades, the completion of the new electrical systems and starting restoring the Basilica stone columns. Based on promised funds for the year 2018, further tasks are planned to be implemented related to the promotion and enforcements of the preventive conservation approach and enhance the visibility and developing interpreting tools for the World Heritage Site.

Regarding the age of the roof fabric (Decision 41 COM 7A.42 - Item 6), this important task is still one of the restoration program priorities and needs a huge budget. Due to lack of funds, the Presidential Committee is implementing the different priority tasks based on the available funds.

It is worth mentioning that the draft Conservation Management Plan for the entire Site shall address the diverse issues already discussed in the Conservation Plan for the Church of the Nativity.

2.2 *Completed restoration works at the Church of the Nativity during the year 2017*

2.2.1 *The restoration of the northern, eastern and southern external stone facades*

Restoring the external stone facades recommenced in September, 2016 by erecting the necessary scaffolding system; define their state of conservation and documentation, cleaning works and the removal of the cement pointing. The work on northern, eastern and southern facades completed in March 2017, June 2017 and October, 2017 respectively.

2.2.2 *The installation of the electrical system (lighting and smoke detection systems)*

As for the essential electrical systems, the main purpose of the lighting system is to provide a safe movement for both the visitors and pilgrims inside the Church, as well as highlighting the historical art elements such as the walls, floors, mosaics, paintings on columns, inscriptions and decorative carvings on the wooden doors and architraves.

Concerning the smoke detection system, it was installed to reveal the presence of fire or future potentially dangerous. The work completed in December, 2017.

2.3 Ongoing restoration works at the Church of the Nativity

2.3.1 Restoration of the stone columns and its related historical paintings

There are fifty stone columns (Capital, Column and Base) and the ten existing Capitals” without columns and bases inside the Church of the Nativity, running in four rows creating the central nave and four aisles. Thirty-two of the existing columns carry Crusader Christian paintings related to religious and historical symbols. However, their age and lighting conditions make them hard to see.

Based on the available funds, the Palestinian Presidential Committee has authorized the restoration of additional nineteen columns, including their paintings and two capitals in the central nave based on the final study recommendations.

The intervention on the stone column included; the removal of the protective structure applied to the column paintings within the restoration works, restoration of the non-decorated surfaces of shafts and bases, removal of the incoherent and coherent deposits, cleaning and removal of unsuitable filling, and the realization of new filling, consolidation with the cleaning of the paint film.

The ongoing restoration works (the nineteen columns and two capitals) are ongoing and planned to be completed by the end of March, 2018, while the restoration works of the rest of the stone columns are postponed until the necessary funding is secured.

2.4 Future remaining works

Apart from the ongoing restoration for the nineteen stone columns and two capitals, all contractual works of the Church of the Nativity were completed in December, 2017. However, according to the restoration program financial status, more additional fund is still needed to concentrate on the remaining priority tasks, including the following:

2.4.1 Restoration of stone columns and paintings

The estimated needed budget for the restoration of the remaining thirty columns and eight capitals is about 1,200,000 Euros and will start in case of additional fund is available. The restoration works will include cleaning, consolidation of the capitals, shafts and bases, removal of the coherent and incoherent deposits, consolidation of the existing cracks and holes as well as retouch and protection of the existing paintings.

2.4.2 *Restoration of the floor mosaic*

About 80 cm below the existing reddish stone floor there are the remains of a marvelous mosaic carpet that dates back to the period between Constantine's and Justinian's Churches, late fourth to sixth century. The mosaic surface suffers from cracks, deteriorations in some parts, in addition to incoherent and coherent deposits due to the atmospheric particulate. The preliminary estimated cost of the restoration of the floor mosaic based on the final study recommendations by the experts is around 2,500,000 Euros.

Limited budget has been secured to start the restoration with a part of the mosaic floor at the central nave and Transept north and planned to be completed by the end of June, 2018. The restoration of the rest mosaic floor will resume in case additional funding is secured.

2.4.3 *Restoration of the internal stone and marble floor*

The floor of the basilica in the central nave, the northern and southern lateral naves are currently tiled with local hard red stones, which are affected by an incoherent and partially coherent, superficial deposits of atmospheric particulate, while the floor of the northern, southern and central apses are still tiled with white and gray marble which suffers from wide cracks due to the anthropogenic damage. The estimated cost of the stone floor restoration works is around 800,000 Euros. The mentioned restoration works will start in case necessary fund is secured.

2.5 ***The Conservation Management Plan for the World Heritage Site***

In reference to the World Heritage Committee decision (41 COM 7A.42, item 7), the State Party has started developing a Conservation Management Plan for the entire World Heritage Site, after receiving international assistance from the World Heritage Centre and additional generous funds from the Russian and Swedish Governments, which were designated to cover all activities of the project.

Before the actual works on the Conservation Management Plan commenced, the UNESCO National Office for Palestine organized a workshop in Amman on between 21st-23rd of March, 2017. Two ICOMOS experts participated and illustrated the main role of Conservation Management Plans to sustain the Outstanding Universal Values of World Heritage Site for the present and future generations, in terms of overcoming all challenges to avoid consequences that may affect and threaten the Site components.

The actual work on the Conservation Management Plan for the World Heritage Site "*Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route*" officially started on the 1st of April, 2017 after signing a Memorandum of Understanding between the four project partners; the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities,

Bethlehem Municipality, the Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

The first stage of developing the Conservation Management Plan demanded diverse data collection on the Site, in terms of historical, religious, social and economic development and cultural significance. This data was collected by a number of questionnaires that targeted the inhabitants and the shop owners along the Pilgrimage Route, in addition to workshops with the local community, conducting specialized studies, and involving the main key stakeholders and decision makers.

The Conservation Management Plan includes the following three main sections:

- Section I: contains a brief description of the site, its history and the attributes of the Outstanding Universal Values under which the Site was inscribed on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.
- Section II: includes an assessment and analyses of the different conditions of the site as well as the relevant opportunities, which may enhance the Site. This section also sheds light on the various stakeholders involved in managing the Site, and describes the present legal framework by which the Site is maintained.
- Section III: includes objectives and diverse strategic aims and policies designed to protect the Site in a way that meets international standards, and identifies the role of each partner involved in the management process. It also includes an Action Plan for implementing the different objectives which are directly associated with the needs of the Site and its users.

It is worth mentioning that the Conservation Management Plan shall be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review. Once it is approved and adopted, it will become an official tool to manage the entire World Heritage Site ([Annex no.3](#)).

3 Ongoing projects to conserve the World Heritage Site and its Buffer Zone

3.1 Rehabilitation of Star Street and Branches

Star Street is the longest part of the Pilgrimage Route, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in Danger in 2012, due to its Outstanding Universal Value, that is directly associated with the Birth of the Jesus. However the Street has suffered negligence since Al- Aqsa Intifada in the year 2000, which caused severe destructions to the infrastructures and the urban fabric, which adversely affected the inhabitants of the Historic Center in Bethlehem. As a result, most of the shop owners along Star Street closed their shops to invest in other places. Today, it is merely a road that allows vehicles reach their destinations and offers an inadequate parking for cars.

Bethlehem Municipality desires to revive the Street, by encouraging the inhabitants and shop owners to reopen their neglected shops over the long term through the rehabilitation project, which is expected to offer sustainable activities and relevant facilities to the visitors and the pilgrims on their walking trail to the Church of the Nativity, while taking into consideration the extraordinary spiritual and historical significance of the Street; which testified the passage of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph when they entered Bethlehem on their way to the Grotto, “the place where Jesus Christ was born”.

In January, 2017 Bethlehem Municipality launched the tender documents for the design phase of the project, *“Rehabilitation of the Star Street and branches”*. The design of the total project was awarded to the Community Development Group (CDG), being the best responsive bid with the lowest price. The design phase was completed in October, 2017, where the design was based on three categories; providing accessibility to the services, conserving the built-up heritage and providing facilities and services for the Street’s inhabitants and visitors.

The design of the project focused on protecting the significant physical expression of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site, in terms of reducing and managing traffic in the Route, which required tremendous efforts to create alternative routes and parking areas for the vehicles, in order to meet the needs of the inhabitants of the Pilgrimage Route, as well as controlling and minimizing traffic flow in the Historic Centre of Bethlehem. Moreover, the design addressed the different existing aspects of the Site by offering unique and diverse experiences, which shall aim at its enhancement, as well as highlighting the following:

- Creating a drop-off point at the northern end of Star Street to provide the pilgrims and visitors the opportunity to walk down the Route towards the Church of the Nativity. This step shall also enhance the walking trails and revive the economic situation in the Street.
- Providing parking lots in the immediate vicinities to accommodate the cars of the inhabitants of the Pilgrimage Route and the visitors, as an alternative to parking them along the Street. This is an important initiative towards freeing the Street from the vehicles.
- Providing an exit route for the vehicles and tourist buses through the Orient Star Street, which shall be rehabilitated as part of the scope of the project. The Orient Star Street connects the Catholic Action Roundabout, located at the northern end of the Pilgrimage Route, and hence is directly connected to the Historic Center of Bethlehem with the Manger Street.
- Organizing traffic flow in the area adjacent to the Bethlehem University by creating an alternative exit route for vehicles to reduce traffic flow into the Historic Centre.

The rehabilitation of Star Street includes a series of physical interventions, which aim at providing proper infrastructures to adapt the Street to the needs of today's living standards in order to improve the quality of life for the local inhabitants and the shop owners, who are considered the main actors for developing the cultural heritage embedded in the Route. On the other hand, the rehabilitation of the Route offers sustainable services for the visitors and the pilgrims. These physical interventions in the Route include the following:

- Rehabilitation and Beautification of Star Street
- Rehabilitation of Wardieh Street (branched from Star Street)
- Rehabilitation of Orient Star Street (branched from Star Street)
- Rehabilitation of Traditional Water Wells
- Beautification of commercial stores
- Improving condition of residential units
- Rehabilitation of the sanitary facilities at the Peace Center
- Rehabilitation of Bethlehem Municipality Buildings
- Construction of parking lots in Bsieleh area

3.1.1 *Ongoing works related the rehabilitation of Star Street and Branches*

Project #1: Construction of parking lots in the Bsieleh area (Donated by The Government of Russian Federation).

The area of the proposed parking lots is located within the Historic Centre of Bethlehem, and is only a few meters away from the Star Street and directly connected to the Manger Street.

This initiative by Bethlehem Municipality offers parking lots for the inhabitants of the area to park their cars in a proper and safe place as an alternative of parking along Star Street. This project has been designed and implemented under the supervision of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

The parking lot project includes two floors with a total surface area of 170m², and a capacity to host sixteen cars. The implementation of the project has commenced in December 2017 and expected to be finished in June 2018.

Project # 2: Rehabilitation of sanitary facilities at the Peace Centre (Donated by The Government of Russian Federation).

The Peace Centre, located in the Manger Square and managed by Bethlehem Municipality, has sanitary facilities on the basement floor that needed urgent maintenance. Opening the facilities for public use is necessary as to accommodate the needs of the pilgrims and the visitors of the city.

The rehabilitation of the sanitary facilities included upgrading the infrastructure, tiling the floors, installing public toilets with convenient electrical and mechanical works.

The execution of works started in October 2017 and finished in December 2017, under the supervision of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

It is worth mentioning that the implementation of the other project's activities has started immediately after the Christmas season, mainly with the beginning of February 2018, and the execution of works is expected to be completed by February 2019 under the supervision and management of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

3.2 *The Manger Square Tunnel and the Manger Square Village (multipurpose parking and commercial center)*

1- The Manger Square Village (multipurpose parking and commercial center): In August 2017, and in line with the World Heritage Committee Decision (41COM 7A.42), a final decision has been taken to cancel the proposed project due to its huge scale in such a critical area, as it may affect adversely on the authenticity and the integrity of the Site, as well the consequent threats on reviving the Star Street through attracting the flow of the pilgrims, the visitors and the locals to the proposed project, which shall be vibrant with diverse activities. In addition to its adverse impact on the traffic flow in the Historic Centre.

2- The Manger Square Tunnel: in line with the World Heritage Committee Decision (41COM 7A.42), the State Party is committed to postpone any progress in this proposed project until the completion of the second phase of the Transport and Mobility Master Plan for the Bethlehem Governorate, which shall reveal strategies in terms of addressing and managing the traffic congestions in the city as well as offering sustainable transport and mobility plan for the city. Furthermore, this project requires further researches and solid justification in addition to preparing Heritage Impact Assessments to address the wide range effects of any potential threats on the Site.

3.3 *Transport and Mobility Master Plan for Bethlehem Governorate*

From an urban perspective, the significant features of the city of Bethlehem; being the Birthplace of Jesus Christ, as well as a land rich of history, religious significance, historic sites and architectural treasures, the city became a tourist destination that attracts visitors from all over the world. This fact necessitates providing more services to meet the requirements of the tourism industry.

The city suffers from irregular urban growth, increasing and widely spreading built-up areas, insufficient road infrastructure and public transportation networks, both in terms of capacity and quality that respond to rapidly growing car ownership. The aforementioned factors have a negative impact on the quality of life in the city as they cause traffic congestions, poor accessibility, noise and pollutions, deterioration of public spaces, and lack of safety standards. The current situation of the city, hence needs urgent management to avoid aggravating in the coming years.

In cooperation with the Municipality of Paris, Bethlehem Municipality raised the urgent need for the “*Transport and Mobility Master plan for Bethlehem Governorate*”, to address all the different issues related to traffic management. Up till today, significant progress has been made in the project, after a competitive tender organized by Bethlehem Municipality, the first phase of the project was awarded to Community Development Group (CDG) who had established a joint venture with Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem / society (ARIJ) in order to take care of the household survey, data collection and GIS Application.

This phase was successfully finished in August, 2017. It includes collecting and analyzing data on traffic and transport, which is considered an essential input for the second phase, and upon which the actual Transport and Mobility Plan will be designed. It is worth mentioning that the Municipality of Paris, funded the project and provided the needed technical support and consultancy to the Bethlehem Municipality for the execution of the project.

In October 2017, Bethlehem Municipality has launched the tender documents for the Second Phase of the project, where the second phase shall address the followings:

- Developing scenarios for a sustainable transport and mobility plan for the city of Bethlehem.
- Proposals for road infrastructure, public transport, parking areas, pedestrian zones and mobility management
- Testing of the impact of scenarios of the transport demand model
- Drafting of the transport and mobility Master Plan for Bethlehem Governorate.

The project was awarded to Community Development Group (CDG) and scheduled to be completed in January 2019. (Annex no.4)

3.4 Ongoing conservation projects performed by the State Party

Bethlehem Municipality is eagerly willing, along with its partners, to retain the features of the Historic Centre by carrying out a series of rehabilitation activities in the Historic Centre of Bethlehem, with an aim to conserve the built-up heritage and adaptively reuse the abandoned buildings for the sake of serving the local community and meeting their needs.

These projects include the followings:

Project #1: Rehabilitation of the Bethlehem Old Market (Funded by American Near East Refugee Aid "ANERA")

The Old Market is located in the heart of the Historic Centre of Bethlehem and serves the locals by providing adequate commercial services.

The rehabilitation project focuses on the beautification of the Market, which shall contribute to improving the aesthetic appearance of the site. The activities of the project included cleaning and pointing the outer facades, tiling the floors, painting the iron works, as well as managing the movements of the merchants and shoppers. The project is expected to be completed by the end of February 2018.

Project #2: Adaptive reuse of Dar Al-Sabagh (Funded by Swedish Government)

The building is located in a strategic location in the Core Zone of the World Heritage Site, directly at the Star Street.

The project aims at rehabilitating an abandoned building to be reused as a specialized center that conducts comprehensive studies and researches to fulfill the needs of the Bethlehemites living in the diaspora, as well as the local community.

The project activities include rehabilitation of the infrastructure, cleaning and pointing the outer facades, interior renovation of the existing tiles and facades. The project is expected to be completed by the end of March 2018, under the direct supervision of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

Project #3: Rehabilitation of the Handcraft Center (Funded by Swedish Government)

The building in which the handicraft center shall be established is located within the heart of the Core Zone and directly overlooking the Star Street. The building consists of three stories, and belongs to the St. Joseph School for girls.

The Municipality has initiated the project to revive the Star Street by creating a Handcraft Center that teaches the local community and the schoolgirls the traditional local industries and handicrafts.

The implementation of the project has started on October 2017 and is expected to be completed in April 2018 under the supervision of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

Project #4: Rehabilitation of the Mosaic school (the Custody of the Holy Land)

The building that shall host the Mosaic School is located in the Star Street, adjacent to the *Al-Zararah Arch*¹ and belongs to the Custody of the Holy Land. The rehabilitation project is a private sector initiative that aims at adaptively reusing an abandoned old building by converting it into a Mosaic School that targets the local community in order to teach them the mosaic craft in order to save this authentic craft for the future generations.

The project has started in September 2017 and is expected to be completed in April 2018.

4 Removal the property Birthplace of Jesus; Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem, Palestine, from the list of the World Heritage in Danger

The Desired State of Conservation and related Corrective Measures were developed towards the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger. ***The State of Palestine is requesting the World Heritage Committee to remove the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger after the successful performance of the conservation works of the roof and the narthex of the Church of the Nativity as all of the corrective measures have been completed, and a Conservation Management Plan for the entire Site has been developed.***

¹The arch is the traditional main gate of Bethlehem from Jerusalem.

The tradition says that it was the gate that Mary and Joseph entered Bethlehem.

The gate probably existed in Canaanite time, but it was rebuilt by Emperor Justinian and in the 15th century by the Ottomans.

5 Support provided by the UNESCO Ramallah Office

The UNESCO Ramallah office through its Culture Unit continued to be actively involved in the conservation, management and promotion of the property through constant technical and, when possible, financial support for the safeguarding of the World Heritage Property.

In fact, through the International Assistance from World Heritage Fund (USD 30,000), UNESCO Ramallah office is supporting the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and other relevant stakeholders in the preparation of the Conservation Management plan of the property. In addition, the preparation of the plan was supported through an additional financial contribution (USD 22,000) from office project “Local Development through the rehabilitation and revitalization of the historic built environment in Palestine” funded by the Government of Sweden through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The technical staff of the office participated in the regular meetings and workshops held in the World Heritage Property, contributed to and helped the planning team with their technical expertise during the preparation phase, and reviewed the draft documents and provided guidelines for the development of the Conservation and Management plan. Furthermore, the office identified and consulted an international expert to further review the plan and provide recommendations for possible improvement.

Several visits to the property and meetings with national and local stakeholders and potential donors were initiated and took place. These collaborative meetings aimed at assessing the State of Conservation of the property and reviewing the identified conservation and management challenges as well as at proposing solutions.

The UNESCO Ramallah office continues its effort in advocating for streamlining of all individual efforts and projects that advocate for a sustainable conservation and promotion of the property. In this regard the office provided technical support in the implementation of the project for the rehabilitation of Star Street and branches, funded by the Russian Federation as well as in the preparation of the Nativity Church restoration project funded by the Government of Italy, emphasizing on a comprehensive capacity development program for Palestinians throughout the implementation of restoration works in the Church.

6 Conclusions

The Palestinian presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity has performed tremendous efforts, that focused on the successful completion of the conservation and restoration works on the roof and the narthex of the Church, in addition to other various activities based on a list of priorities provided by the final study recommendations and available funds. Moreover, various interventions were proposed and carried out by Bethlehem Municipality and its partners that are involved in managing the World Heritage Site to ensure sustainable preservation for the Site.

On the other hand, a Conservation Management Plan for the entire World Heritage Site has been developed with the participation of all concerned local stakeholders. The Conservation Management Plan shall be submitted to the World Heritage Committee for review, and it is considered a fundamental tool to assure the maximum preservation of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site. Once it is approved and adopted, it will become an official tool to manage the Site.

Concerning the projects within the property, the design phase for rehabilitation of the Star Street and branches is completely finished, focusing on offering accessibility and services for the pilgrims, visitors and the inhabitants of the Street as well as providing alternatives to manage the traffic flow in the Historic Centre, and aiming at promoting the walking trails which shall revive the Street, and providing adequate parking lots nearby the Route which shall contribute to freeing the Site from vehicles, as well providing public safety measures for the pedestrians. Additionally, the design aimed at the rehabilitation of the buildings' facades located along the Pilgrimage Route, the pavements of the Route and stairways, and the rehabilitation of the traditional water wells within the Site. The design took into consideration the minimum interventions shall be made in order to respect the authenticity and the integrity of the Site.

As for the other proposed projects, especially the Manger Square Tunnel, The State Party has declared to act according to the World Heritage Committee decision (41 COM 7A.42) and postpone any progress until the completion of the second phase of the "Transport and Mobility Master Plan for the Bethlehem Governorate" which is expected to be finished in January, 2019 and shall address all the negative aspects related to the traffic congestions in the city.

While the other proposed project "the Manger Square Village" is cancelled due to its huge scale in such a critical area adjacent to the Church of the Nativity, as it may affect adversely on the foundation and the visual impact of the Site. In addition to the consequent threats to reviving the Star Street through attracting the flow of the pilgrims, the visitors to the proposed project.

In light of all mentioned above, **the State of Palestine is requesting the World Heritage Committee to remove the Property from the List of World Heritage in Danger** after the successful completion of the restoration works at the Church of the Nativity, as well as completing the corrective measures set for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger and the completion of the final draft of the Conservation Management Plan for the entire World Heritage Site.