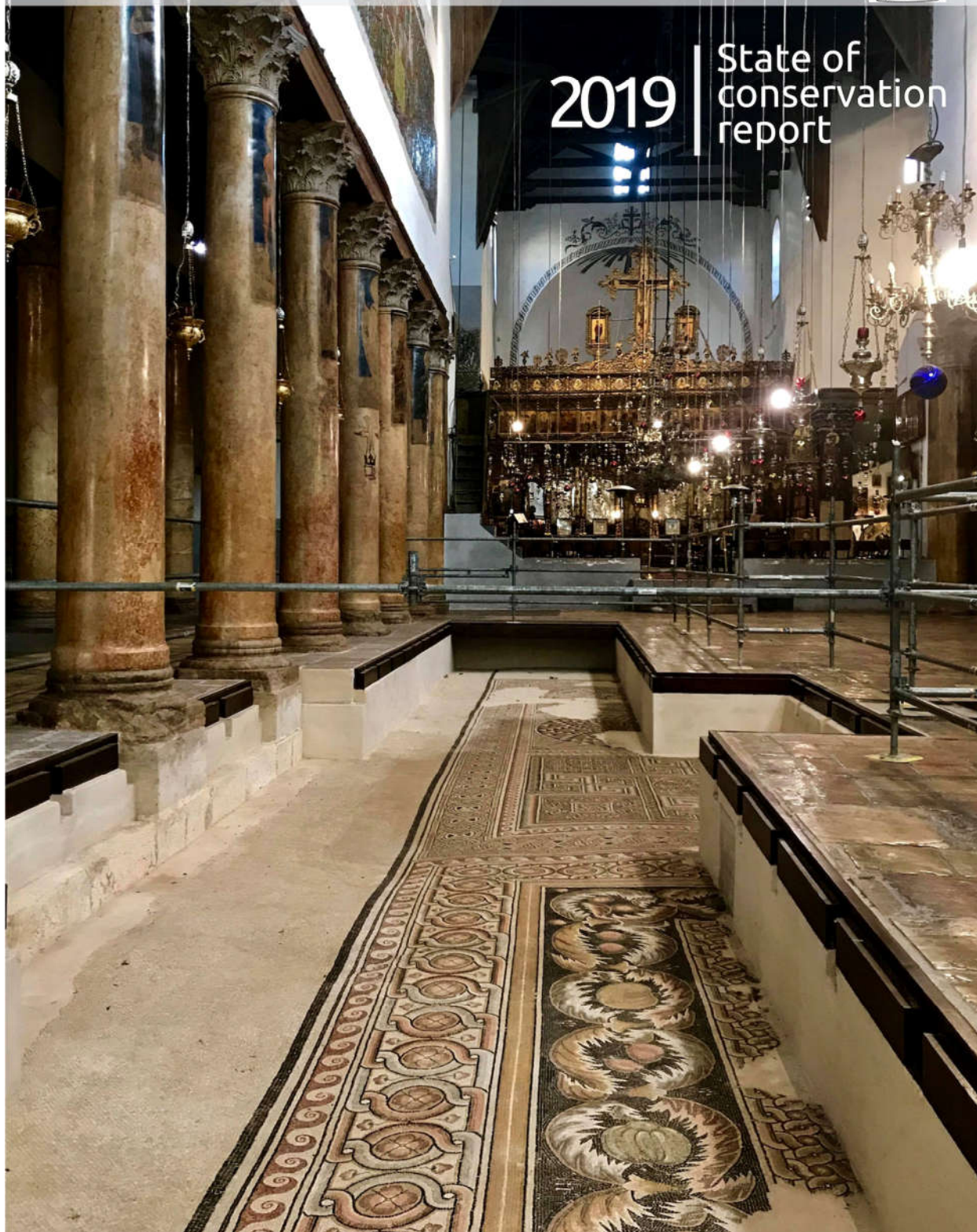


BIRTHPLACE OF JESUS: CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY AND THE  
PILGRIMAGE ROUTE, BETHLEHEM REF. 1433, PALESTINE



2019

State of  
conservation  
report



Follow the link (<https://fil.email/BtswOL8s>) to see the annexes no. (1+2+4+5+6) listed below:

Follow the link below to see the Annex no. 3):

<https://wetransfer.com/downloads/68a20fd1df1e0b8aafa87d5fa8769a5220190130130158/c9f02d1f9a6435b428e564842661065620190130130158/64facd>

**Annex no.1:** Brief Construction Progress Report / September 15, 2013 – December 31, 2018

**Annex no.2:** The Palestinian Presidential Committee response regarding the status of the Corrective measures.

**Annex no.3:** the revised copy of the Conservation Management Plan for the World Heritage Property.

**Annex no.4:** Documents related to the completed tasks of the ongoing restoration program.

**Annex no.5:** Restoration of the Historical and Religious Center of the City of the Bethlehem-of the Star Street (funded by the Government of the Russian Federation).

**Annex no.6:** the decision of the Bethlehem Municipality council

---

The World Heritage Property (WHP), “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 accordance with the Decision “42 COM7A.27-item 9” adopted at the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee held in Manama, Bahrain (24 June – 4 July).

Bethlehem Municipality prepared the State of Conservation report (SOC) of the “Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem (Palestine) (C1433), in close cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), the Palestinian Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity (PCRCN) and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP), for examination by the World Heritage Committee during its 43<sup>rd</sup> session in 2019.

## Contents

1.	Executive Summary .....	3
2.	The restoration works at the Church of the Nativity.....	5
2.1.	The State Party’s response to the WHCom decision: 42 COM 7A.27 .....	5
2.2.	Restoration of the stone columns and their historical paintings.....	5
2.3.	Restoration of the floor mosaic .....	6
2.4.	Future remaining works (2019) .....	7
2.4.1.	Restoration of stone columns and paintings .....	7
2.4.2.	Restoration of the floor mosaic .....	7
2.4.3.	Restoration of the marble floor.....	7
2.4.4.	Implementation of soft components related to the site management .....	7
3.	The Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the entire World Heritage Property .....	8
4.	The conservation works at the World Heritage Property and its Buffer Zone .....	8
4.1.	Restoration of the Historical and Religious Center of the City of Bethlehem-of the Star Street .....	8
4.1.1.	The rehabilitation of the public toilets (sanitary facilities) in the Peace Centre.....	9
4.1.2.	Construction of parking lots in Bsieleh area.....	9
4.1.3.	Ongoing projects related to the Restoration of the Historical and Religious Center of the City of Bethlehem –of the Star Street.....	10
4.1.3.1.	Rehabilitation of al-Wardieh Street and its Branches .....	10
4.1.3.2.	Rehabilitation of the Orient Star Street .....	10
4.2.	Transport and Mobility Master Plan for Bethlehem Governorate.....	10
4.3.	The Manger Square Tunnel.....	11
4.4.	Rehabilitation of Marcos Arch and stairway (funded by the Government of Sweden through the UNESCO) .....	11
4.5.	Rehabilitation of the Old Market (funded by the USAID through “ANERA”).....	12
4.6.	Adaptive reuse of Dar AL-Sabbagh (funded by the Government of Sweden through the UNESCO)	12
4.7.	Rehabilitation of handicraft center (funded by the Government of Sweden through the UNESCO)	12
4.8.	Rehabilitation of the Mosaic school (private initiative).....	12
4.9.	Initiatives conducted by the State Party .....	12
4.9.1.	The Palestinian Tangible Cultural Heritage Law.....	12
4.9.2.	3D documentation of the Historic Centre .....	13



5. Removal the Property from the List of the World Heritage in Danger .....	13
6. Conclusions .....	13

## 1. Executive Summary

PCRCN succeeded to maintain a smooth implementation of the restoration works at the Church of the Nativity since September 2013. Works included the restoration of the roof of the Church, which was completed in April 2016, in addition to other completed interventions that were selected according to priorities based on the final recommendations and the available funds from different donors. The additional works included the restoration of the Narthex, the Narthex' Eastern wooden door, the external stone façades, internal wall plastering, wall mosaics, Basilica metal doors, wooden architraves, installation of lighting and smoke detection systems, the restoration of forty six columns (out of the fifty Basilica columns) with their paintings in the nave area, besides the restoration of eight capitals out of the total ten capitals. In addition, 70% of the floor mosaic restoration are completed. Currently, the works are progressing according to the available funds, and include the restoration of the remaining four columns and two capitals in addition to the restoration of the remaining 30% of the floor mosaic.

In reference to the World Heritage Committee( WHCom decision 42COM7A.27, the State Party would like to confirm that most of the requirements, requests, comments and notes have been fulfilled through the already accomplished tasks, as stated in the submitted documents or documents annexed to this report. As for the dating of the historic timbers, it is worth mentioning that within the investigative survey made in 2010, more than 250 samples from the structural wooden element were collected and analyzed to conduct the desired dating.

As it was impossible to localize the various interventions made over the centuries, it was decided to preserve as much of the existing materials as possible. Fortunately, less than 8% of all existing wooden truss elements have been replaced. All of the elements inside the Church, regardless of the dating, starting from the roof and reaching down to the floor mosaic that dates back to the fourth century, are considered delicate and of extreme importance, and were treated with extensive care by experienced and specialized restorers. This strategy was considered during the restoration works and will kept considered until the completion of all needed works.

Thus, the results of any additional future investigative study concerning the dating of the historic timber will not change any of the decision taken regarding the interventions that have already took place or to be done in the future. All results, documents, analysis related to the completed tasks are available in Annex no. 4.

A draft Conservation Management Plan for the World Heritage Property "Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and Pilgrimage Route" was submitted to the World Heritage Centre in January 2018. ICOMOS provided the State Party with technical comments, which have been taken into consideration in the revised draft of the Conservation Management Plan, submitted along with this report (See Annex no.3).

The next part of the report includes the progress concerning the ongoing projects in the Historic Centre. The projects include the Restoration of the Historical and Religious Center of the City of Bethlehem –of the Star Street, while the completed projects which mentioned in the report enhance the scope of protection within the boundary of the Historic Centre as they include different elements of cultural heritage, and also play a

vital role in conserving the authenticity of the Property and improve the people's experience in the Historic Center (See Annex no.5).

Moreover, the report focuses on the progress made in the transport and mobility master plan for Bethlehem governorate (phase II), as well as updates "the Manger Square Tunnel" project between the Manger Square and the Nativity Square to develop the regulation of the traffic flow in the area, which was proposed and then canceled by Bethlehem Municipality (See Annex no.6).

Additionally, the report highlights the initiatives conducted by the State Party for safeguarding the entire Property from any potential risk, including launching the first national legislation in the field of cultural heritage (Decree Law on Tangible Cultural Heritage n. 11 – 2018), in addition to the first phase of "3D documentation of the Historic Centre" project that aims at documenting the existing traditional buildings in order to conduct 3D visualization of the Historic Centre.

**The last part of the report is dedicated to the request of the State Party to remove the Property from the list of the World Heritage in Danger after the completion of the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger and its corrective measures set for the Property, the finalization of the Conservation Management Plan for the entire Property that ensures removing any potential threats that may affect its authenticity and integrity , as well as implementation of high standard conservation interventions at the Church of the Nativity.**

## 2. The restoration works at the Church of the Nativity

### 2.1. The State Party's response to the WHCom decision: 42 COM 7A.27

Regarding the WHCom decision 42 COM 7A.27, the State Party confirms that all requirements, requests, comments and notes have been fulfilled through the already accomplished tasks and through the documents already submitted to the World Heritage Centre or annexed to this report. As highlighted in the previous SOC reports, an investigative survey of the roof structures and their components was carried out in reference to the archaeological surveys on the global scale of the building, which allowed for a deeper insight on the construction history of the whole Church, and on its architectural significance.

During the diagnosis and the dendrochronological dating analysis performed for the wooden structural elements, more than 250 sample were collected and analyzed.

As previously identified various historical interventions in the Church was impossible, a decision was made to preserve as much of the existing materials as possible, in particular the roof wooden components. In order to assure minimum intervention, accurate visual and instrumental inspections and diagnosis of each truss was carried out, followed by restoring the most damaged parts of each structure. A few cases required total replacement, where the used wood for replacements and prostheses is ancient; four-five hundred years old and acquired from abandoned Italian sites. This was intended to avoid shrinkage, fungi and insect attacks in the replaced wood. However, it is worth noting that less than 8% of all existing truss elements have been replaced.

Since 2010, and from the early beginning of the restoration program, the restoration works aimed at maintaining the integrity of the material and assuring the conservation and protection of its historical, cultural and religious values. Restoration was made and achieved by following the principles of restoration, stated in the various Charters of restoration, ICOMOS and UNESCO documents, and by choosing the most appropriate restoration techniques in a manner that respects the importance and uniqueness of the monument. All the Church elements, starting from the roof down towards the floor mosaic, regardless of the dating, whether already restored or to be restored in the near future, are considered as delicate and extremely important elements, and are to be treated with extensive care by experienced and specialized restorers. Thus, the results of any additional future investigative study concerning the dating of the historic timber will not change any of the decision taken regarding the interventions that have already took place or to be done in the future. All results, documents, analysis related to the completed tasks are available in Annex no. 4.

### 2.2. Restoration of the stone columns and their historical paintings

The Basilica includes fifty columns (composed of capital, shaft and base). There are also ten locations where there are only capitals (without shaft or base). Thirty-three columns out of the fifty have paintings, and decoration on the upper parts. During the restoration, each column has been cataloged by dilapidation and photographic survey before, during, and after restoration. The collected information and the historical iconographic research have been documented. (See Annex no.4)

As reported previously, the restoration works on twenty columns as well as two capitals located in the central nave of the Basilica were completed. During 2018, PCRCN succeeded to secure more funds for this major task, and accordingly, the restoration of additional twenty-six columns and six capitals located in the central nave, Lateral Nave North and South and in transept north was completed. (See Annex no.1)

A high historical-artistic value characterizes each single part that have been studied and analyzed to comprehend the general historical context. For all phases, the materials obtained from the stratigraphic tests have been analyzed and classified based on the state of conservation and realized photographic survey, and have been measured and classified.

The columns date back to the Justinian age, and show delicate pictorial decoration made with oil binder, and implemented during the Crusades age; during a period of East–West Schism between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, which is reflected in the presence of saints from both the Occident and the Eastern traditions in the paintings. The column decorations were studied by Father Germer-Durant in the 1891, and represent one of the most interesting and attractive elements present in the Church.

After the realization of the paints, the columns have preserved the historical traces of the events as the engraving and graffiti made by pilgrims, acts of vandalism, restoration works carried out by aggressive cleaning operations and heavy color retouching. (For more details, refer to Annex # 4)

### **2.3. Restoration of the floor mosaic**

According to the archaeological investigations carried out in the thirties of the last century, a considerable part of Constantine's floor mosaic was hidden under the floor of the Basilica. Exposing the extraordinary hidden mosaic floor was intended to evaluate it carefully, and to make it visible to visitors and scholars, especially in the nave. As planned, and according to the priorities of the restoration tasks, the PCRCN succeeded to secure the necessary funds to start and complete about 70% of restoring the floor mosaics North Transept and the Northern side of the Central Nave during 2018. (Annex no.1)

The restoration works included the removal of superficial incoherent deposit from the mosaic surface, blocking of loose tesserae, pre-consolidation of the tesserae and the bedding mortar, followed by the consolidation of preparatory mortar layers. The disinfection and the removal of the unsuitable fillings have been also performed. Each phase of the restoration has been documented by graphic and photographic documentations with all necessary mappings.

Careful archeological excavation was carried out on the uncovered mosaics during 2018, by an experienced archeologist and a team of specialized restorers. The archeological excavation made represented an ideal and unmissable opportunity to understand the right architectural and chronological context of the fragments of mosaics to be exhibited. In the northern part of the nave, it is now possible to see the mosaics dating back to the Constantinian-era basilica with the walls of the same period and also shows the cut in the floor mosaic made to allow for the construction of the new Giustinian-era basilica.

The archeological excavation has been performed as follows:

- Numbering and photo-mapping of tiles;
- Removal of tiles, using hand chisels to loosen and cut the joints;

- Demolition of the substrate of the tiles in lime mortar;
- Identifying a portion of the original stratigraphy along the columns of the nave, about 40 cm away;
- Graphic and photographic documentation;
- Starting the stratigraphic excavation of the individual layers.

(For more details, refer to Annex # 4)

## **2.4. Future remaining works (2019)**

Despite the great progress achieved during 2018 concerning developing the Conservation Management Plan for the Property, and the restoration works of the stone columns and the floor mosaic (that have been implemented based on the available funds), additional priority restoration and management tasks will be carried out in 2019. The needed funds for part of these priorities are already available to maintain a smooth continuation, but more funds are still needed. The priority tasks include the following:

### **2.4.1. Restoration of stone columns and paintings**

As mentioned in section 2.2, the future works related to the columns' restoration includes restoring the four remaining columns (capital, shaft and base) and two capitals located at the Altar and South Transept as indicated in Annex no.1. These tasks are expected to be completed by the end of April 2019.

### **2.4.2. Restoration of the floor mosaic**

As mentioned in section 2.3, about 70% of restoring the floor mosaics was completed in 2018. The remaining 30% of the floor mosaic is located in the southern side of the Central nave as well as in South Lateral Nave. This is expected to be completed by the end of June 2019.

### **2.4.3. Restoration of the marble floor**

The floor of the North Transept is tiled with white - gray marble tiles, which suffer from wide cracks due to the anthropogenic damage. Restoring the marble floor is expected to be completed by the end of June 2019.

### **2.4.4. Implementation of soft components related to the site management**

Some important soft tasks regarding the future site management are planned to be implemented by June 2019, and shall handle two main issues as follows:

1. Promoting and enforcing a preventive conservation approach:
  - a. Developing a disaster risk management plan
  - b. Implementing a training on monitoring and maintenance issues and their respective methodologies.
  - c. Implementing a training course on the Church conservation and management planning.
2. Enhancing visibility and developing interpreting tools for the Church.
  - a. Elaborate a detailed and accessible account illustrating the outstanding attributes of the Church, repair works implemented and repair methodology adopted through the creation of a website and a short documentary film.
  - b. Capacity building training in sustainable tourism management in the Church.
  - c. Elaborating, editing, and printing an interpreting booklet about the Church of the Nativity.



### **3. The Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the entire World Heritage Property**

In line with the World Heritage Committee decision (41 COM 7A.42, item 7), the State Party completed the draft copy of the CMP for the entire World Heritage Property “Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and Pilgrimage Route”, after receiving international assistance from the World Heritage Centre and additional generous funds from the Russian and Swedish Governments, which were allocated to cover all the activities of the project.

The draft copy of the Conservation Management Plan was submitted to the World Heritage Centre on January 2018. An ICOMOS technical report that assessed the plan was sent to the State Party, which managed to respond to the provided comments. A revised draft of the CMP is attached to this report (Annex no. 3).

Once it is approved and adopted by the committee, the CMP will become an official tool to manage and conserve the entire World Heritage Property in Bethlehem.

### **4. The conservation works at the World Heritage Property and its Buffer Zone**

Bethlehem Municipality has dedicated its effort with all its partners to carry out several projects in the property to enhance and protect it, mainly projects that target the renovation and revitalization of traditional buildings in the Historic Center of the Bethlehem, for the benefit of the local community and the visitors, while at the same time building local capacities in cultural heritage preservation. These projects aim at promoting the cultural tourism, raising public awareness of the values of cultural heritage and highlighting the socioeconomic aspect of cultural heritage preservation through creating job opportunities, as well as providing facilities and services for the public use. These projects are:

#### **4.1. Restoration of the Historical and Religious Center of the City of Bethlehem-of the Star Street**

The Star Street is the longest part of the Patriarch Route or the Pilgrimage Route. It is considered the ancient entrance to Bethlehem and the main approach to the old core, and it is the route that Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph took on their way to the “Grotto”, the place where Jesus was born.

Currently the street suffers from deterioration in the infrastructure and the urban fabric, as well as inactive commercial and cultural activities as shop owners prefer to invest elsewhere. Hence, the street now only serves as a pathway for vehicles, and an inadequate car park.

Bethlehem Municipality has received funds from the Russian Federation Government for the Restoration of the Historical and Religious Center of the City of Bethlehem-Star Street to be implemented over the duration of two years as well the Bethlehem Municipality obtained a one year extension for the project to be finished in February 2020 .(Annex no. 5)

The project plays a vital role in enhancing the street’s essence as a spiritual destination, as well a venue for cultural, religious and public activities. Revitalizing the street shall enhance the cultural resources and contribute to developing the local economic system, while at the same time offer the visitors and pilgrims the

chance to explore the unique architectural heritage that dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which reflects the traditional lifestyle during that period.

It is worth mentioning that the proposed design for the project was submitted to the World Heritage Committee in October 2018 in line with the Decision 42. COM 7A.27, along with certain clarifications the Committee asked for, as well as the State Party's tendency to revive the Street.

Concerning the "Rehabilitation of Star Street", the main contribution of the project is to revive the Pilgrimage Route in terms of providing clean, safe and attractive atmosphere for the owners to encourage them to reopen their closed property, and to invest in the Route. Reviving the Route is essential as it has a significant potential to enrich the visitors' cultural experience while creating sustainable activities and services to meet the needs of both locals and tourists.

The scope of the project includes beautification measures, which are designed to enhance the aesthetic appearance of the Property and improving the environment condition for the users. Works shall include; installation of street benches, canopies and garbage bins, planting of trees and green areas, cleaning of the monuments, as well cleaning and pointing the needed external facades of the historic buildings located along the Route. Works also include dismantling all existing balconies and replaced them with wood and steel structures, as well as removing all the electrical wiring and replacing them by underground services.

The project also provides a drop off point at the northern part of the Route near Catholic Action roundabout to enable visitors to walk down the Route on their way to the Church of the Nativity. This is accompanied with monitoring the traffic flow and offering alternatives to ensure the safety standards for the pedestrians and enhance the visitors' experience in the Property. All interventions are taking into consideration the minimum intervention in the Property; all the additions are reversible and light structure with no adverse impact on the image of the Route or its Outstanding Universal Value.

Several interventions were implemented during 2018 within the framework of the project, including:

#### **4.1.1. The rehabilitation of the public toilets (sanitary facilities) in the Peace Centre**

Providing sanitary facilities for the visitors and the pilgrims visiting the city is important. Additional works were incorporated with the rehabilitation works as an accidental fire occurred in the Peace Center at the end of the year 2017, causing serious damage in the infrastructure, hence requiring immediate repair of the electromechanical networks of the toilets.

#### **4.1.2. Construction of parking lots in Bsieleh area**

Bethlehem Municipality offers parking lots for the inhabitants of Star Street to park their cars in an adequate place, as an alternative to free the Street from vehicles as well to enhance the pedestrian movement. Bsieleh area, where this parking lot was created, is located in a critical point and considered a linkage between the Star Street and the Manger Street.

The two story parking building has been operating since June 2018, has a total area of 170 square meters and hosts sixteen cars.

### **4.1.3. Ongoing projects related to the Restoration of the Historical and Religious Center of the City of Bethlehem –of the Star Street**

#### **4.1.3.1. Rehabilitation of al-Wardieh Street and its Branches**

Currently, within the scope of the project the works are progressing with the rehabilitation of al-Wardieh Street and staircases, the area of the project includes three vital staircases; Handal , Al-Juljul and Al- Wardieh staircase. These routes are located in a strategic location in the Historic Centre, and are used daily by the inhabitants of the area, as well as the visitors and students, as they link Star Street with the area where Bethlehem University is situated. The rehabilitation of these routes shall promote the pedestrian movements inside the historic center, and enhance tourism as well as they provide visitors with a safe environment and infrastructure to wander around the town. The work started in August 2018 and is expected to be completed during February 2019.

#### **4.1.3.2. Rehabilitation of the Orient Star Street**

The other project being implemented is the rehabilitation of the Orient Star Street, including part of the Star Street, the Action Club roundabout, and the Orient Street which will be used as a one side exit street to evacuate vehicles and touristic buses that drop off tourists at the northern end of the Pilgrimage Route (Action Club roundabout). The project aims at minimizing traffic flow inside the WHP and enhancing the walking trails in the Historic Centre. The works started in August 2018 and are expected to be completed in August 2019.

The rehabilitation works for the aforementioned streets and staircases shall enhance the aesthetic appearance while providing safety standards for the users, as well as enhancing the pedestrian movement and organizing the traffic flow in the area. These works include several components, such as:

- Rehabilitation of the existing infrastructure, sewage, water and lighting network.
- Removal of existing surface material (either tiles or asphalt) and installing new ones.
- Cleaning and pointing of the heritage facades while removing the plants which affect adversely on the integrity of these buildings.

## **4.2. Transport and Mobility Master Plan for Bethlehem Governorate**

The Bethlehem Municipality, in cooperation with Paris Municipality has prioritized the “Transport and Mobility Master plan for Bethlehem Governorate” to improve accessibility by providing guidance towards the establishment of a sustainable transport and mobility system. The first phase of the project was conducted by local firm “Community Development Group” (CDG) that had established a joint venture with Applied Research Institute –Jerusalem /society ( ARIJ) and other local partners involved in the project.

That phase was successfully finished in August 2017, and included data on different issues related to the project such as traffic, transport, household survey, GIS application and other necessary statistics and data that is considered a milestone in planning the process for a future sustainable mobility in the governorate.

Up till today, significant progress has been made in the second phase which financed by the French Agency for Development ( AFD) through the Paris Municipality after analyzing the collected data to identify mobility

policies and strategies to achieve the goals of the project by adapting all the challenging, in order to find the best solutions and opportunities. Moreover the second phase is being executed between the (CDG) and “move mobility – smart moving cities”

It is worth mentioning that between 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> of September 2018, Bethlehem Municipality, jointly with the Paris Municipality, organized a two-day workshop with the presence of representatives from local institutions and organizations involved in the project in order to raise awareness of the importance of the project. Several issues were discussed during the workshop, including the proposed scenarios for the future sustainable mobility in Bethlehem Governorate, as well the challenges in terms of car traffic, pollution, low quality of the pedestrian areas, parking lots and traffic accidents. Moreover, all the comments and the opinions provided by the participants during the workshop will be taken to consolidate the final phase of the project, which is expected to be finalized in May 2019.

Another workshop was organized in 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2018 in order to choose the best measures and proposed project that shall enhance the various mobility scenarios prepared by the work team, in terms of overcoming the traffic congestions and identified problems in the governorate. Among the discussed topics were the following:

- Road network, vehicle traffic and fleet
- Public transport
- Public spaces (walking and cycling)
- Parking areas
- Tourism and urban accelerators
- Governance (organizations) and enforcement
- Traffic safety
- Education and information

### **4.3. The Manger Square Tunnel**

Concerning the proposed project “the Manger Square Tunnel” which was suggested between the Manger Square and the Nativity Square to address any potential urban pressure and traffic congestion within the area, the Bethlehem Municipal Council decided, in their session no. 86 on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018, to cancel the project. The decision was made as the project might have an adverse impact on the authenticity and the integrity of the WHP (see annex no.6)

### **4.4. Rehabilitation of Marcos Arch and stairway (funded by the Government of Sweden through the UNESCO)**

The area of the project is located in the Historic Centre, and suffers from a lack of infrastructure and poor conditions and was in need of urgent restoration as to provide proper infrastructure to adapt the street to the living standards. Intervention in this area also contributed to improving the quality of life for the inhabitants while enhancing the aesthetic appearance of the historic quarter and raising the safety standards for its users.

The rehabilitation works included a series of physical interventions. It started in July 2018 and was completed in December 2018.

#### **4.5. Rehabilitation of the Old Market (funded by the USAID through “ANERA”)**

The rehabilitation works completed in March 2018, mainly targeted the beautification of the structure of the marketplace, which contributes to the aesthetic appearance of the Historic Center and facilitate purchasing the goods offered to the people.

#### **4.6. Adaptive reuse of Dar AL-Sabbagh (funded by the Government of Sweden through the UNESCO)**

Rehabilitation of this unique building that is located in a strategic location in the heart of the Pilgrimage Route plays a vital role in reviving the street and enhancing the people’s experience. After rehabilitation, the building is currently being used as a center for comprehensive studies and researches that fulfill the needs of the Bethlehemites living in the diaspora, while at the same time hosting anyone who wishes to learn more about Bethlehem. The rehabilitation works finished during the June 2018, and building has been operating since October 2018.

#### **4.7. Rehabilitation of handicraft center (funded by the Government of Sweden through the UNESCO)**

The Center is located along the Pilgrimage Route, and belongs to the St. Joseph School for girls. It offers educational courses to empower the school –girls and women and teaching them the traditional and local industries and handicrafts that contribute to the improvement of their living conditions, as well as contributing to the revival of Star Street. After the completion of the rehabilitation works of the building in May 2018, the center has become an attractive point for both the locals and the visitors

#### **4.8. Rehabilitation of the Mosaic school (private initiative)**

Adaptive reuse of this once-abandoned building to serve as a mosaic center for teaching the locals the mosaic craft is considered a great progress conducted by the private sector to ensure their involvement with the State Party in managing and reviving the WHP. The building has been operating since June 2018 after the completion of the rehabilitation works that were carried out by the owners, The Custody of the Holy Land.

#### **4.9. Initiatives conducted by the State Party**

##### **4.9.1. The Palestinian Tangible Cultural Heritage Law**

Generally speaking, the State Party suffers from the lack of sufficient legislative frameworks in the field of cultural heritage, up till June 2018, the acting heritage law was the Jordanian Law of Antiquities (1966) that was applied in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the 1929 Antiquities Ordinance was introduced since the British period in Palestine. The legal framework did not change after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Hence, these laws were considered inadequate to address the various challenges facing the modern-day life circumstances and all that is related to the different forms of heritage in the Palestinian society.

The State Party dedicated its efforts to update the existing laws concerning the safeguarding of the Tangible Palestinian Cultural heritage. As a result, MoTA launched the first Palestinian Cultural Heritage Law in June



2018, following four years of extensive consultation process conducted by MoTA, with the technical and financial support of UNESCO National Office for Palestine, and close cooperation with other national and international bodies specialized in conservation and protection of cultural heritage.

The newly-endorsed law covers a wide range of aspects regarding the protection and management of the different elements that constitute the Palestinian cultural heritage. It encompasses provisions that safeguard all components of cultural heritage, in line with international standards based on the provisions of international conventions ratified by the State of Palestine. The law also defines the administrative roles and responsibilities of all actors involved in heritage protection and management, namely MoTA.

#### **4.9.2. 3D documentation of the Historic Centre**

Bethlehem Municipality has carried out the first phase of the project “the 3D documentation of the Historic Centre” which was carried out by specialized experts from Pavia University and includes digital survey documentation to achieve 3D visualization of the Historic Centre.

Bethlehem Municipality alongside Pavia Municipality in Italy has obtained a fund from the Italian Cooperation for Development ( AICS) for the management and control of the urban growth for the development of heritage and improvement of life in the city of Bethlehem .

### **5. Removal the Property from the List of the 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 implementation of the conservation works at the Church of the Nativity, which included a series of restoration works mainly targeted the restoration of the roof and the narthex and all other components of the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger and its corrective measures that were set for the property, along with developing the Conservation Management Plan for the entire Property and the cancellation of the proposed “the Manger Square Tunnel “ project.

### **6. Conclusions**

As mentioned in this report, many important activities have been accomplished in line with the WHCom decision 42 COM 7A.27. The activities are summarized as follows:

- Completing a considerable part of the needed restoration works in the Church of the Nativity.
- Submitting the revised Conservation Management Plan for the entire World Heritage Property.
- The decision of the Bethlehem Municipality council to cancel the proposed “Tunnel at the Manger Square” project.

**Accordingly, the State of Palestine considers that what has been completed and achieved has already fulfilled the requirements of the WHCom., specifically the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger and its corrective measures set for the Property as well as the comments and requests specified in WHCom decision 42 COM 7A.27. The State of Palestine is requesting the World Heritage Committee to remove the Property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.**