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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Thirty-second session

Quebec City, Canada
2 – 10 July 2008

Item 12 of the Provisional Agenda: Protection of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage

Report on the protection of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage

SUMMARY

This document provides a summary of the progress made in the implementation of the activities related to decisions taken by the Committee since its 26th session in Budapest (2002), which aim at providing technical assistance in favour of the protection of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage. It also provides information on the state of conservation of Palestinian heritage and preservation measures as requested by the Committee's decision **31 COM 12A**.

Draft Decision: 32 COM 12, see Point III.

I. Activities related to World Heritage in the Palestinian Territories

1. In June 2002, at its 26th session in Budapest, the World Heritage Committee recognized the exceptional universal value of the Palestinian cultural heritage, and requested the Secretariat to assist the Palestinian Authority in establishing an inventory of such outstanding cultural and natural heritage, evaluating its state of conservation and the measures for its safeguarding, as well as building capacities within the responsible Palestinian institutions in view of the future implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*. Since then, the allocation of funds by the World Heritage Committee (USD 450,000) has contributed to activities implemented by the UNESCO Office in Ramallah, in close consultation with the responsible Palestinian authorities, mainly the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, with the support of the World Heritage Centre.
2. A series of activities were carried out, in particular the establishment and publication of the *Inventory of Palestinian cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding universal value*, which was presented to the 29th session of the Committee (Durban, 2005). Other ongoing activities were:
 - World Heritage awareness-raising initiatives (publication and distribution of information material, consultative workshops);
 - Reinforcement of the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat (staff training, related web page upgrading and management, collection of resource materials, equipment);
 - Institutional capacity-building and sharing of knowledge (training courses on information management, site management and risk preparedness);
 - A special project focused on the identification and conservation of cultural landscapes in accordance with the above-mentioned *Inventory* (site No. 8: the Land of Olives and Vines).
3. The activities foreseen during the period between the 31st (Christchurch, 2007) and the 32nd (Quebec City, 2008) sessions of the Committee, according to the work plan drawn up in consultation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, were the following:
 - The elaboration of conservation plans for the old cities of Hebron and Nablus, including the management plan of the archaeological site of Tell Balata, in Nablus (assessment, emergency conservation and planning tools);
 - The second phase of the project for the safeguarding of cultural landscape;
 - Continued support to the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat, including the provision of assistance in the preparation work for potential future nominations through documenting, mapping and zoning of at least three sites included in the *Inventory of Palestinian cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding universal value*.
4. In spite of this plan, the conditions on the ground imposed drastic changes in the implementation of the activities, and it was not possible to obligate the totality of the allocated funds. Violations against cultural properties were reported, and phenomena such as looting of archaeological sites and illicit trafficking of archaeological objects increased significantly due to the economical decline.
5. However, in the second half of 2007, a number of activities were carried out, namely:

- The support in the organization of an international symposium on conservation of cultural heritage and other related disciplines as urban planning and architecture in historic centres within the framework of the second RIWAQ Biennale (October 2007), which represented a great opportunity to discuss key issues for the preservation of cultural heritage, e.g. the role and responsibilities of the public, the private and the tertiary sector;
 - The support extended to the Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Birzeit University to organize the International Conference on Landscape Conservation and Planning (November-December 2007), which was the occasion to enlarge the debate on the endangered Palestinian cultural landscapes locally and internationally, and paved the way to projects and plans for an effective protection of this threatened asset.
6. At its 31st session (Christchurch, 2007), the World Heritage Committee adopted Decision **31 COM 12A** allocating an additional USD 100,000 for the preservation of Palestinian heritage during the 2008-2009 biennium. Therefore, the activities listed above will be continued, or initiated, as the situation prevailing on the ground had not allowed an immediate implementation. These activities, intended to focus on existing projects, will notably involve:
- The preparation of a potential nomination file for Bethlehem, birthplace of Jesus Christ, as requested by the Palestinian Authority. This will include the evaluation and eventual modification of the Conservation and Management Plan drafted within the framework of the project funded by Italy as mentioned below;
 - Continuing support to the project “Design of the protective shelters of the mosaic area of the Great Bath Hall of Qasr Hisham in Jericho and other facilities of the Archaeological Park”;
 - The completion of the management plan of the archaeological site of Tell Balata in Nablus, as part of one itinerary foreseen within the Cultural Route project;
 - The completion of a model conservation plan for the safeguarding of the “Land of Olives and Vines” cultural landscape;
 - The support to the database/GIS project “Protecting and monitoring archaeological and cultural sites in the Palestinian Territories”, through the provision of technical assistance to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to inventory Palestinian cultural heritage sites, monitor their state of conservation, and build capacities, in the framework of the reinforcement of the Palestinian World Heritage Secretariat.

II. Conservation of Palestinian cultural heritage

7. The UNESCO Office in Ramallah, in close coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, has progressed in the implementation of conservation projects, mainly through extrabudgetary projects, such as:
- a. Bethlehem** - Within the framework of the “Bethlehem Area Conservation and Management Plan”, funded by the Government of Italy (USD 500,000), concrete results have been achieved during the first 12 months of implementation, namely: the completion of the first phase of the 1:500 detailed survey of the urban fabric of the three historic towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, based on a newly acquired aerial photograph; the establishment of a database of all available archival materials on Bethlehem area; the collection of key documentation, including the mapping of all rehabilitation projects carried out in the three historic towns. A “web-based office” has been set up, enabling the team of international consultants to coach the local working team, ensuring a continuous on-the-job training for 10 young Palestinian architects. The

participation strategy, designed to actively involve the local communities, has been designed and its implementation started.

b. Nablus - Within the framework of the “Revitalization Plan of the Old City of Nablus”, sponsored by the Munir Sukhtian Group-Jordan (USD 100,000), further to the results of the “National Open Design Competition for ‘Architects Under 40’ and ‘Students in Architecture and Urban Planning’ to design public spaces and urban facilities in the Old City of Nablus”, the UNESCO Ramallah Office, during October and November 2007, conducted three consultative meetings with the 10 winning groups (one from Gaza contacted via video-conference) and the local authorities concerned, namely the Municipality of Nablus and the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (MOTA), to take decisions about the implementation of the proposals. Three sites out of six, Ras al-Ain, al Qarion and Habalah, have been selected for implementation.

Regarding the “Restoration and adaptive reuse of the Khan al-Wakala,” a project funded by the European Commission, the provision of Technical Assistance to the Municipality of Nablus for the rehabilitation of the caravanserai (Phase 1, 180,000 euros) has been completed and the project handed over. Phase 2 of the project (1,327,000 euros) started concretely in December 2007 with the preparation of the tender documents for the structural component for the construction of new wings of the building, as per the approved project.

c. Jericho - In the framework of the project concerning the “Design of the protective shelters of the mosaic area of the Great Bath Hall of Qasr Hisham in Jericho and other facilities of the Archaeological Park”, UNESCO is providing financial support and technical expertise. The USAID-funded project has been reactivated in October 2007, and implementation started in March 2008. Part of the local team of architects, selected through a competition in early 2006, and the world-renowned international consultant Peter Zumthor met in Switzerland in December 2007.

d. Hebron - In cooperation with the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, UNESCO is fine-tuning a project for the training and conservation of several historic buildings or centres in different villages around Hebron. Preliminary discussion was held with Saudi Arabia, which expressed interest in supporting this initiative.

8. Finally, on 4 and 5 March 2008, the Joint UNESCO-Palestinian Authority Committee met at UNESCO Headquarters and discussed a wide range of issues linked to the implementation of the newly designed “Palestinian Reform and Development Plan”. During the meeting, ongoing and future projects were discussed. One of the flagship projects is the framework programme entitled “Developing Cultural Routes in Palestine: in the footsteps of the Prophets”, comprising 12 pilot projects to be implemented in various locations of the West Bank and Gaza focusing on cultural heritage preservation and employment generation. A publication of the framework document is under preparation and will be distributed to potential donors.

III. Draft Decision

Draft Decision: 32 COM 12

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC-08/32.COM/12,*
2. *Recalling Decision **31 COM 12A** adopted at its 31st session (Christchurch, 2007),*

3. Commends the efforts of all professionals involved in preserving the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage despite difficult conditions;
4. Regrets that the prevailing situation, besides heavily affecting the life of the communities, does not allow effective and smooth implementation of conservation programmes;
5. Urges all parties concerned with the safeguarding of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage to take appropriate measures to prevent and avoid any damage to the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage and requests the World Heritage Centre to continue its efforts to this end, in liaison with the concerned parties;
6. Thanks the concerned States Parties, IGOs and NGOs for their substantial contributions to UNESCO's action in the Palestinian Territories and appeals to them to continue supporting this endeavour;
7. Also requests the World Heritage Centre to continue assisting the Palestinian institutions concerned in reinforcing their capacity in the protection, preservation and management of the Palestinian cultural and natural heritage;
8. Further requests the World Heritage Centre to present a progress report to the World Heritage Committee at its 33rd session in 2009.