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OCCUPIED PALESTINE

SUMMARY

This document is submitted pursuant to 201 EX/Decision 30, by which the Executive Board decided to include the item entitled "Occupied Palestine" in the agenda of the 202nd session. The present document provides a progress report on developments since the 201st session of the Executive Board.

There are no financial or administrative implications.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 19.



I. Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls

1. The state of conservation of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls (site proposed by Jordan) is the subject of regular reporting to the Executive Board and to the World Heritage Committee. The Executive Board at its 201st session (April 2017) as well as the World Heritage Committee at its 41st session in Krakow (July 2017) took, by roll-call vote, similar decisions stressing “again the urgent need to implement the UNESCO reactive monitoring mission to the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls”. The 16th Reinforced Monitoring Report dated May 2017 on the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls was sent to all World Heritage Committee members.
2. Pursuant to 176 EX/Special Plenary Meeting and to the decisions of the Executive Board and the World Heritage Committee since 2007, the World Heritage Centre has spared no efforts to facilitate exchanges between Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and Waqf experts regarding the design of the Mughrabi Ascent in the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as to facilitate the UNESCO Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls and a UNESCO experts meeting on the Mughrabi Ascent.
3. However, at the time of the preparation of this document, the monitoring mission and experts meeting requested by the Executive Board and by the World Heritage Committee could not be undertaken.
4. In 2016, the Director-General issued statements on the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls, recalling that as per its inscription on the World Heritage list, the Old City of Jerusalem is the sacred city of the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and that each of its communities has a right to the explicit recognition of their history and relationship with the city. She referred to the Al-Aqṣà Mosque/al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf, holy site to Muslims, also revered by Jews as the Har HaBayit or Temple Mount, a few steps away from the Church of the Saint Sepulcher revered in Christianity, as testimony to the spiritual significance of Jerusalem as a microcosm of humanity’s diversity and, in itself, “an appeal for dialogue, not confrontation”.
5. In a context of heightening tensions on the ground, by letter dated 25 July 2017, the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO expressed deep concerns regarding the decision of the Israeli authorities to install cameras and metal detectors at the entrance of the Old City holy site, underlining that this decision “undermined the historical status quo around the Al-Aqṣà Mosque/al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf.” The Secretariat has forwarded these concerns to the Permanent Delegation of Israel to UNESCO.
6. Following the agreement signed between UNESCO and the Norwegian Government in December 2011 on the project for “Ensuring the sustainability of the Centre for the Restoration of Islamic Manuscripts of the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem”, UNESCO has deployed its assistance to build the Centre’s staff capacities in the preservation of Islamic manuscripts. Since the outset of the project, 10 staff of the Centre have been granted permanent staff positions and 14 learning modules were implemented, with over 1,538 hours of training on conservation and restoration techniques, in addition to study tours to restoration centres in Paris and Florence in 2013. The project also provided the Centre with conservation equipment and materials. UNESCO conducted seven monitoring and consultation missions during the project implementation period. The stakeholders are currently discussing a possible new phase of the project to be implemented after the current phase’s completion in 2017 or 2018.
7. The refurbishment of the Islamic Museum in the Haram Al-Sharif and its Collection, funded by Saudi Arabia, is currently on hold pending additional funding to complete the proposed museographical and scenographical planning, which was approved in March 2015 by the Awqaf authorities. A follow-up mission took place in June 2015. The re-opening of the Museum will depend on the availability of additional funds, and is foreseen beyond 2018.

8. Should additional information become available to the Secretariat regarding the above-mentioned matters, the Director-General is prepared to publish an Addendum to this document before the 202nd session of the Executive Board in order to inform the Members of the Executive Board of any new developments in that regard

II.

A. Reconstruction and development of Gaza (February 2017 – June 2017)

Education

9. Over the reporting period, UNESCO has continued its resource mobilization efforts to secure funds aimed at supporting higher education in Gaza, still in need of recovery from the impacts of the July-August 2014 war.

10. UNESCO continued to support vulnerable university students in Palestine through the activities of the two community libraries “Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz” in the Gaza Strip (located in Gaza City and in Khan Younis, respectively), funded by the Saudi Committee for the Relief of Palestinian People, with the provision of study and research library facilities, textbooks and other resource materials. Since the last reporting period, the libraries have continued to increase the number of beneficiaries and conduct activities within the Right to Higher Education Advocacy Campaign.

11. Jointly with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), UNESCO and the MoEHE celebrated the Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) in the last week of April 2017, gathering about 110 education stakeholders, civil society, youth and representatives of the MoEHE, with parallel activities on “accountability for SDG4 and citizen participation”. Some of these activities have taken place in the 12 “Prince Nayef Ben Abdel Aziz” Community Libraries in the West Bank and Gaza.

12. The major disruption in the supply of energy in 2017 in Gaza and the ongoing electricity crisis, has also impacted the smooth conduct of the Tawjee exams (baccalaureate) held from 4 to 22 June 2017 and involving 28,814 students in Gaza. UNESCO continuously supported the MoEHE by facilitating the transportation to and from Gaza of exam materials, such as question papers and answer sheets.

Culture

13. UNESCO is updating the inventory of cultural heritage sites in the Gaza Strip, building on its Detailed Needs Assessment carried out after the July-August 2014 war.

14. Within the framework of the International Fund for Promotion of Culture (IFPC), UNESCO supported a series of live contemporary dance theatre performances in Gaza, through the Theatre Day Productions in Gaza. The programme included a six-week training on contemporary dance, movement and choreography for 20 selected young artists, involving youth between 18 to 30 years of age through 20 performances in Gaza Strip and 10 in the West Bank. UNESCO supported the production of a performance entitled “Identity”, being performed on live stage since May 2017 in Gaza. The performance is part of the project “Awakening of Understanding – Youth Drama and Dance Theatre from Gaza”, aiming at connecting the communities divided between Gaza and the rest of Palestine, through theatre creativity and fight against gender-related stereotypes and prejudices.

15. With regard to UNESCO’s activities in the areas of communication and information, gender equality, and youth, these are reported in document 202 EX/39.

B. The two Palestinian sites of al-Ḥaram al-Ibrāhīmī/Tomb of the Patriarchs in al-Khalīl/Hebron and the Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ Mosque/Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem

16. This matter has been on the agenda of the Executive Board since its 184th session.

17. On 30 January 2017, the World Heritage Centre received a request by the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to process the nomination of **Hebron/AI-Khalīl Old Town** for inscription on the World Heritage List in compliance with the standard procedure. By letter dated 9 March 2017 the Permanent Delegation of Palestine requested to process this nomination on an emergency basis.

18. The World Heritage Committee at its 41st session (July 2017) inscribed **Hebron/ AI-Khalīl Old Town** on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi)**, as well as on the List of World Heritage in Danger following a vote by secret ballot.

Proposed decision

19. The Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling previous decisions concerning “Occupied Palestine”,
2. Having examined document 202 EX/38,
3. Decides to include this item in the agenda of its 204th session, and invites the Director-General to submit to it a follow-up report thereon.