



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Two hundred and eleventh session

211 EX/33

PARIS, 9 April 2021
Original: English

Item 33 of the provisional agenda

OCCUPIED PALESTINE

SUMMARY

This document is submitted pursuant to 210 EX/Decision 36, by which the Executive Board decided to include the item entitled "Occupied Palestine" in the agenda of the 211th session. The present document provides a progress report on developments since the 210th session of the Executive Board.

There are no financial or administrative implications.

Decision required: paragraph 20.



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Occupied Palestine

(Follow-up to 210 EX/Decision 36)

Sub-item I: “Jerusalem”

1. “The Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls (Site proposed by Jordan)”, is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and is the sacred city of the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The historical, cultural and spiritual significance of Jerusalem, as a microcosm of humanity’s diversity is, in itself, an appeal for dialogue.
2. Pursuant to relevant decisions of the Executive Board and the World Heritage Committee, which have been adopted on a consensual basis by the two governing bodies since October 2017, UNESCO has sought to facilitate exchanges between Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian (including Jordanian Waqf) experts regarding the protection of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls, including to facilitate the UNESCO Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Old City and a UNESCO experts meeting on the Mughrabi Ascent. At the time of the preparation of this document, the monitoring mission and experts meeting had not yet been undertaken. The state of conservation of the property will be presented at the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee to be held in July 2021.
3. In accordance with the agreement signed between UNESCO and the Norwegian Government in December 2011 on the project, entitled “Ensuring the Sustainability of the Centre for 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 in 2011: 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 Amman, Paris and Florence carried out in 2013. Ten staff of the Centre have been granted permanent positions by Jordan. The Centre currently enjoys a restoration and conservation laboratory with essential equipment, facilities and materials, that were provided under the project. Moreover, UNESCO conducted seven monitoring and consultation missions during the project implementation period, between 2011 and 2015, contributing thus to its effective and efficient execution. Committed to building the long-term sustainability of the Centre and to consolidating the acquired skills, the Government of Norway renewed its support to UNESCO in 2020 for a new phase of the project aiming at making the Centre fully operational and autonomous through the restoration of the premises and the elaboration of a long-term conservation and management strategy. Its implementation modalities are being finalized.
4. Concerning the project, entitled “The Safeguarding, Refurbishment and Revitalization of the Islamic Museum of Haram al Sharif and its Collection”, which is funded by Saudi Arabia, the premises of the Museum have been renovated and equipped, and staff has been appointed and trained in inventorying, cataloguing, basic conservation, restoration, photography, English language and ICTs. Discussions have been initiated with the Jordan and Jerusalem Awqaf to continue supporting the Museum, when the situation allows.
5. Since the 210th session of the Executive Board, the Secretariat has received one letter from the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO regarding the reported arson at the Gethsemane Church in East Jerusalem on 4 December 2020 and previous acts of vandalism at other Christian religious sites, as well as the respect of the UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995), The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The Secretariat followed up with Israel asking it to provide relevant information in this regard.
6. Additionally, a joint letter was received on 9 February 2021 from the Permanent Delegation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO and the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO concerning the reported destruction of the historic stairway and the walls of the Al-Yousifieh Islamic Cemetery, which is located next to the Walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, and the respect of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and

its two Protocols and the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The Secretariat followed up with Israel, State Party to the Conventions, asking it to provide relevant information in this regard.

7. A letter was received on 18 March from Israel regarding the World Heritage Site “Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls”, in response to the Secretariat’s inquiry about reported excavations undertaken by the Israeli authorities at Al-Buraq Plaza and near the Mughrabi Gate of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Israel informed the Secretariat that according to its Antiquities Authority, no excavations had been carried out near the Mughrabi Gate and that, therefore, the foundations of the Al-Aqsa Mosque were safe and intact.

8. Information relating to correspondence received during the reporting period is reflected in the annex to this document.

Sub-item II: “Reconstruction and development of Gaza”

9. The outbreak of COVID-19, and the measures implemented to contain it, have eroded the already limited purchasing power and resilience of poor people across the Gaza Strip. By the third quarter of 2020, 48.6% of the work force in Gaza was unemployed¹ while the proportion of poor households is estimated to have reached 64%, by the end of 2020². A recent assessment carried out by the Gaza Protection Consortium found that, to meet their basic needs, some 90% of these families had accumulated large and unsustainable debts, with a range of negative ramifications. Other coping mechanisms reported by the families to meet their basic needs, include reducing non-food expenditures (41%), sending family members elsewhere to eat (29%), and withdrawing their children from school (5%). While cash assistance is essential to provide some temporary relief to affected families, it is far from being a sustainable solution. Reducing poverty and aid dependency requires significant changes in key policies and practices shaping Gaza’s situation, including a lifting of Israel’s blockade, in line with Security Council Resolution 1860, a long-term halt in hostilities between Palestinian armed groups and Israel, and a resolution of the internal Palestinian divide, among others.

EDUCATION

10. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the education system in the State of Palestine and resulted in the intermittent closure of schools, colleges and universities. In response, schools moved to distance learning and platforms to limit the disruption to the educational process and contain the spread of the virus. Following the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, during the month of December schools were closed in the Gaza Strip, except for 12th Grade students. However, more than 575,000 children and teenagers (over 50% of the school aged population) in Gaza lack access to computer equipment, a reliable power supply and the internet. Additionally, it is estimated that only 30% of households in the Gaza Strip have internet, and these internet connections are often unreliable.

11. The 13-year blockade of the Gaza Strip continues to limit the population’s access to basic social services and social assistance and restrict people’s freedom of movement. More than one million children have severely limited access to essential services and at least 500,000 children have restricted access to safe and clean drinking water³. In this context, UNESCO is currently providing support to the fee waivers of selected university students with poor economic conditions in order to pursue their higher education studies and fulfil their right to higher education. UNESCO is also developing a proposal to extend further support to higher education in Gaza, which is lacking adequate financial resources, to ensure quality and equity. In addition, within the Youth Employment in the Mediterranean project (YEM) funded by the European Commission, UNESCO is identifying the

¹ http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_8-11-2020-lf-en.pdf

² <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/844141590600764047/pdf/Economic-Monitoring-Report-to-the-Ad-Hoc-Liaison-Committee.pdf>

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/state-palestine-humanitarian-situation-report-end-year-2020>

needed skills in the Palestinian labour market, including Gaza, in order to facilitate the employability of youth. It is also planning to support TVET and distance learning in Gaza through a project supported by Japan that is expected to start in March 2021.

CULTURE

12. Due to several restrictions imposed on the Gaza strip, including on movement in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first-ever online capacity-building workshop for Gaza on the basic principles of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was organized in an effort to support local communities as well as heritage bearers in Gaza. This [five-day training](#), which is part of the project “[Strengthening National Capacities for Safeguarding Palestinian Intangible Cultural Heritage](#)” funded by the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism, was conducted by two national facilitators from the UNESCO Ramallah Office premises in two sessions: 26 to 28 October and 4 to 5 November 2020. The training covered an overview of the objectives and key concepts of the 2003 Convention, an introduction to community-based inventorying, ethical principles and responsibilities concerning living heritage and its practices, information generation methods and techniques, and putting community-based inventorying into practice.

13. A cultural institution from Gaza, namely Nawa for Culture and Arts Association, was identified to conduct a pilot inventorying activity on food processing, particularly date culture, in order to reflect the field practice from within the Gaza community and for it to be presented to the training participants. As a result, a series of videos documenting the inventorying exercise with interviews of bearers and explanations about the element and its practice were produced.

14. With funding made available in October 2020, conservation interventions in the Anthedon Harbour, the first known seaport of the Gaza Strip that was partially uncovered through archaeological excavations in 1995 and was [listed in 2012 on the Tentative List of Palestine](#) for sites of potential outstanding universal value, are expected to be initiated early 2021. The site is at severe risk due to partial damage inflicted during the July-August 2014 war, abandon and poor maintenance, incompatible infrastructural works conducted in the past as well as the lack of protection against the sea tide that cuts regularly parts of the site in the absence of a proper physical protection for the site. Taking into consideration the travel restrictions on the Gaza Strip and the complex political situation in Gaza, consultations are ongoing with all the concerned stakeholders, including the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, on the specific activities to be conducted and the most appropriate implementation modality.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

15. Information on UNESCO’s work in this area is available in document 211 EX/34 “Implementation of 40 C/Resolution 67 and 210 EX/Decision 37 concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories”.

GENDER EQUALITY

16. Information on UNESCO’s work in this area is available in document 211 EX/34 “Implementation of 40 C/Resolution 67 and 210 EX/Decision 37 concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories”.

Sub-item III: “The two Palestinian sites of Al-Ḥaram al-Ibrāhīmī/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Al-Khalīl/Hebron and Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ Mosque/Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem”

17. Following the inscription of Hebron/Al-Khalīl Old Town on the World Heritage List, as well as on the List of World Heritage in Danger, at the 41st session of the World Heritage Committee (July 2017), a meeting was held in December 2018 at UNESCO Headquarters between the Permanent Delegation of Palestine, Palestinian experts, Advisory Bodies as well as UNESCO Ramallah Office and the World Heritage Centre to initiate a review of the draft statement of Outstanding Universal Value, which is currently underway.

18. The state of conservation of the Hebron/AI-Khalil Old Town was examined at the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee (30 June-10 July 2019), which adopted without debate and on a consensual basis Decision 43 COM 7A.29 to retain Hebron/AI-Khalil Old Town on the List of World Heritage in Danger. A conservation management plan for Hebron/AI-Khalil Old Town is being elaborated with assistance from the World Heritage Fund.

19. The Secretariat received two letters from the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO regarding Al-Ibrahimi Mosque/The Tomb of the Patriarchs, which is part of Hebron/AI-Khalil Old Town. One of the letters addresses the alleged installation of a Menorah at Al-Ibrahimi Mosque/The Tomb of the Patriarchs. The other letter refers to the reported halting by the Israeli authorities of ongoing conservation work carried out by the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee at the site. Both letters refer to the respect of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols and the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. In light of the importance of these issues, the Secretariat followed up with Israel asking it to provide relevant information in this regard. Information relating to correspondence received during the reporting period is reflected in the annex to this document.

Proposed decision

20. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 211 EX/33 as well as the annexes attached to this decision,
2. Recalling its previous decisions concerning “Occupied Palestine”,
3. Decides to include this item in the agenda of its 212th session, and invites the Director-General to submit to it a follow-up report thereon.

ANNEX I



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Two hundred and eleventh session

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PROGRAMME AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMISSION (PX)

Item 33 OCCUPIED PALESTINE

DRAFT DECISION

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 211 EX/33,
2. Recalling the provisions of the four Geneva Conventions (1949) and their additional Protocols (1977), the 1907 Hague Regulations on Land Warfare, the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954) and its additional Protocols, the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970) and the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), the inscription of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls at the request of Jordan on the World Heritage List (1981) and on the List of World Heritage in Danger (1982), and the recommendations, resolutions and decisions of UNESCO on the protection of cultural heritage, as well as resolutions and decisions of UNESCO relating to Jerusalem, also recalling previous UNESCO decisions relating to the reconstruction and development of Gaza as well as UNESCO decisions on the two Palestinian sites in Al-Khalil/Hebron and in Bethlehem,
3. Affirming that nothing in the current decision, which aims, *inter alia*, at the safeguarding of the cultural heritage of Palestine and the distinctive character of East Jerusalem, shall in any way affect the relevant Security Council and United Nations resolutions and decisions on the legal status of Palestine and Jerusalem, including United Nations Security Council resolution 2334 (2016),
4. Taking note of the letters addressed to the Director-General by the Permanent Delegations of Palestine and Jordan to UNESCO in 2020 and 2021 concerning the sub-sections below,

I Jerusalem

5. Reaffirming the importance of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls for the three monotheistic religions,
6. Bearing in mind that all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the “basic law” on Jerusalem, are null and void and must be rescinded forthwith,
7. Recalling the nineteen decisions of the Executive Board: 185 EX/Decision 14, 187 EX/Decision 11, 189 EX/Decision 8, 190 EX/Decision 13, 192 EX/Decision 11, 194 EX/Decision 5.I.D, 195 EX/Decision 9, 196 EX/Decision 26, 197 EX/Decision 32, 199 EX/Dec.19.1, 200 EX/Decision 25, 201 EX/Decision 30, 202 EX/Decision 38, 204 EX/Decision 25 and 205 EX/Decision 28, 206 EX/Decision 32, 207 EX/Decision 38, 209 EX/Decision 24 and 210 EX/Decision 36, and the ten World Heritage Committee decisions: 34 COM/7A.20, 35 COM/7A.22, 36 COM/7A.23, 37 COM/7A.26, 38 COM/7A.4, 39 COM/7A.27, 40 COM/7A.13, 41 COM/7A.36, 42 COM/7A.21 and 43 COM/7A.22;
8. Regrets the failure of the Israeli occupying authorities to cease the persistent excavations, tunnelling, works and projects in East Jerusalem, particularly in and around the Old City of Jerusalem which are illegal under international law, and reiterates its request to Israel, the occupying Power, to stop all violations which are not in conformity with the provisions of the relevant UNESCO conventions, resolutions and decisions;
9. Also regrets the Israeli refusal to implement the UNESCO request to the Director-General to appoint a permanent representative to be stationed in East Jerusalem to report on a regular basis about all aspects covering the fields of competence of UNESCO in East Jerusalem, and reiterates its request to the Director-General to appoint, as soon as possible, the above-mentioned representative;

II Reconstruction and development of Gaza

10. Deeply deplores the ongoing military developments around the Gaza Strip and their heavy toll of civilian casualties as well as their continuous negative impact in the fields of competence of UNESCO;

11. Deplores the continuous Israeli closure of the Gaza Strip, which harmfully affects the free and sustained movement of personnel, students and humanitarian relief items and requests Israel to immediately ease this closure;
12. Thanks the Director-General for initiatives that have already been implemented in Gaza in the fields of education, culture and youth and for the safety of media professionals, calls upon her to continue her active involvement in the reconstruction of Gaza's damaged educational and cultural components and reiterates, in this regard, its request to her to upgrade the UNESCO Antenna in Gaza and to organize, as soon as possible, an information meeting on the current situation in Gaza in the fields of competence of UNESCO and on the outcome of the projects conducted by UNESCO;

III The two Palestinian sites of *Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tomb of the Patriarchs* in Al-Khalil/Hebron and the *Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque/Rachel's Tomb* in Bethlehem

13. Reaffirms that the two concerned sites located in Al-Khalil/Hebron and in Bethlehem are an integral part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and shares the conviction affirmed by the international community that the two sites are of religious significance for Judaism, Christianity and Islam;
14. Deplores the ongoing Israeli excavations, works, construction of private roads for settlers and of a Wall inside the Old City of Al-Khalil/Hebron which are illegal under international law and harmfully affect the authenticity and integrity of the site, and the subsequent denial of freedom of movement and freedom of access to places of worship and asks Israel, the occupying Power, to end all violations which are not in conformity with the provisions of relevant UNESCO conventions, resolutions and decisions;
15. Regrets the visual impact of the Wall on the site of Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque/Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem as well as the strict ban on access of Palestinian Christian and Muslim worshippers to the site, and demands that the Israeli authorities restore the original character of the landscape around the site and lift the ban on access to it;

IV

16. Decides to include these matters under an item entitled "Occupied Palestine" in the agenda at its 212th session, and invites the Director-General to submit to it a progress report thereon.

ANNEX II

**THE UNESCO REACTIVE MONITORING MISSION
TO THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM AND ITS WALLS**

The Executive Board

1. Stresses the urgent need to implement the UNESCO reactive monitoring mission to the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls;
2. Invites the Director-General and the World Heritage Centre to exert all efforts, in line with their mandates and in conformity with the provisions of the relevant UNESCO conventions, decisions and resolutions, to ensure the prompt implementation of the mission and, in case of non-implementation, to propose effective measures in the report to it at its 212th session;
3. Expresses its commitment to exert its utmost efforts to resolve this issue at its next session.

ANNEX TO THE DOCUMENT

During the reporting period, the following correspondence has been received by the Secretariat in relation to this item:

Date	From	Subject
23 November 2020	Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	Hebron/AI-Khalīl Old Town
8 December 2020	Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	Gethsemane Church in East Jerusalem
5 February 2021	Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	Hebron/AI-Khalīl Old Town
9 February 2021	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO and Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	Al-Yousifieh Islamic Cemetery in Jerusalem
18 March 2021	Ambassador of Israel to International Organizations	The Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls