



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Two hundred and twelfth session

212 EX/43

PARIS, 6 October 2021
Original: English

Item 43 of the provisional agenda

OCCUPIED PALESTINE

SUMMARY

This document is submitted pursuant to 211 EX/Decision 33, by which the Executive Board decided to include the item entitled "Occupied Palestine" in the agenda of the 212th session. The present document provides a progress report on developments since the 211th session of the Executive Board.

There are no financial or administrative implications.

Decision required: paragraph 25.



Job: 202103102

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 was examined at the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee that was 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. Since the implementation modalities have been finalized, the new phase is about to be launched.
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 211th session of the Executive Board, the Secretariat received two letters from the Chairperson of the Arab Group to UNESCO on 11 and 31 May 2021 and two letters from the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO on 11 May and 17 May 2021, addressing the situation of East Jerusalem, including Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, 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, requesting relevant information. In response to the Secretariat’s enquiry, a letter was received from Israel on 11 July 2021.
6. Furthermore, the Secretariat received a letter from the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO on 18 June 2021 concerning the World Heritage property Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir, regarding a decision to transform agricultural lands, partly in the buffer zone, into an industrial zone, in addition to recalling previous

correspondence addressing the establishment of a new Israeli settlement. The letter refers to the respect of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1972 World Heritage Convention. The Secretariat followed up with Israel asking it to provide relevant information in this regard.

7. Additionally, a letter was received from the Permanent Delegation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO and the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO on 20 September 2021, concerning works close to 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 the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

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 blockade on the Gaza strip continues to exacerbate a protracted protection crisis on the two million Palestinians who have been living with limited access to electricity, drinking water and healthcare. They have been further isolated from the external world by restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which have decreased access to clean water and sanitation. A [recent assessment](#) conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)¹ indicates that 20% of communities in Gaza are socio-economically vulnerable, living in substandard or overcrowded housing and lack access to acceptable public services. The assessment also shows 60-80 per cent unemployment rates, while many have limited access, or no rights, to social safety nets.

10. During the recent escalation in May 2021, it was reported that 256 Palestinians, including 66 children and 40 women were killed in Gaza while almost 2,000 were injured, including over 600 children and 400 women, some of whom may suffer from a long-term disability requiring rehabilitation. At the height of the escalation, 113,000 IDPs sought shelter and protection at UNRWA schools or with hosting families. There are still about 8,500 IDPs, including 247 people in two UNRWA schools, primarily those, whose houses were destroyed or so severely damaged as to be uninhabitable. According to local authorities, an estimated 15,130 housing units sustained some degree of damage, as did multiple water and sanitation facilities and infrastructure, 141 government schools and 33 health facilities.²

11. In their letters to UNESCO dated 17 May 2021 and 31 May 2021, both the Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO, and the Chairperson of the Arab Group to UNESCO address the situation in Gaza and the obligations under international law, including UNESCO's conventions, resolutions and decisions.

EDUCATION

12. Following an initial assessment conducted in June, the Education Cluster in Gaza reports that 141 education facilities have been damaged of which 10 have sustained major damages during the escalation. Schools in Gaza have remained closed since the cease-fire on 21 May 2021, affecting almost 600,000 learners. Further 21,300 education staff are also affected. The impact of the 11 days of escalation in the Gaza Strip has worsened the situation with an already weakened education system, electricity and internet services, with little prospects for the children in Gaza to resume face-to-face learning in the short run. The Ministry of Education and UNRWA were forced to conclude the school year on 3 and 10 June respectively, instead of 17 June, due to continuing electricity and internet cuts and damage to school infrastructure. Furthermore, the national Tawjihi Examination was postponed to 24 June 2021.

¹ https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/fact-sheets/2021/factsheet_palestine_may2021.pdf

² <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/response-escalation-opt-situation-report-no-3-4-10-june-2021>

13. Before the escalation and due to the shortage of adequate infrastructure in Gaza, around 65 per cent of schools operate on a double-shift system, resulting in reduced hours in core subjects and foundation learning. Since early 2020, these challenges have been significantly compounded by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to the prolonged closures of schools. The recent events have intensified these structural problems, further putting education out of reach of children and youth and consequently increasing learning losses.

14. As part of its response to the learning crisis, UNESCO has conducted a needs assessment of the damages on higher education institutions in close coordination with the Education Cluster and other partners, hence contributing to the [Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment \(RDNA\)](#) launched in June 2021 by the World Bank in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations.

15. Moreover, an assessment study on the learning loss will be conducted to identify learning gaps and to prepare remedial actions to bridge learning losses. In parallel, psychosocial support will be offered in Gaza through school reopening activities targeting children from grades 1-4 to provide emotional release for students who were affected or traumatized during the recent escalation. In addition, UNESCO is supporting the reduction of youth high unemployment rate in Palestine. In the context of its Youth for Employment in the Mediterranean (YEM) project funded by the European Commission, UNESCO is identifying the needed skills in the Palestinian labour market, including in Gaza; and planning to strengthen TVET and distance learning, through funding received from the Japanese Government and the newly established partnership with the Belgium Development Agency (Enabel).

CULTURE

16. The recent conflict in Gaza had a significant impact on the culture sector. An initial assessment conducted by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture (MoC) indicated that educational and cultural facilities were primarily affected, including publishing houses, bookstores, and cultural centres. The assessment referred to complete or partial damages in more than 40 institutions and centres. Furthermore, the culture sector in Gaza suffered from material losses of rented places, equipment, archives, assets, and belongings, in addition to losses in art collections, rare books, and artifacts, as well as financial losses resulting from the cancellation of events and activities. Moreover, the livelihood of hundreds of cultural professionals, including independent artists and musicians have been highly affected. According to MOC preliminary assessment, the initial estimate of losses in the Culture sector alone adds up to around US\$ 3.4 million, including material damages.

17. The Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) conducted by the World Bank in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations in the aftermath of the conflict could not fully quantify the damages, losses and needs of the culture sector in Gaza due to difficulty in collecting the necessary data during the tight timeframe of this exercise.

18. Due to several Covid-19 case spikes in early 2021 and subsequent restrictions on travelling to the Gaza Strip, UNESCO was not able to visit the [Anthedon Harbour](#) until April 2021 when a 3-day mission was conducted from 6 to 8 April 2021. The mission aimed at assessing the situation of this site and discussing with the relevant authorities the most urgent conservation interventions needed to progressively tackle the several issues affecting it: damages inflicted during the past conflicts, abandon and poor maintenance, infrastructural works conducted in the past as well as sea erosion. This was only partially possible since more restrictive measures to fight the deteriorating situation of Covid-19 in the Gaza Strip were imposed during the mission. It was therefore only possible to visit the part of the site on the shore, not the main inland component. Another mission was planned for May/June 2021 but had to be cancelled due to the conflict in Gaza and since access to the Strip has been again limited mainly to the humanitarian aid and support. A subsequent mission, especially in light of the recent hostilities, to identify the priority interventions required at this stage, was conducted from 16 to 18 August 2021.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

19. Information on UNESCO's work in this area is available in document 212 EX/44 "Implementation of 40 C/Resolution 67 and 211 EX/Decision 34 concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories".

GENDER EQUALITY

20. Information on UNESCO's work in this area is available in document 212 EX/44 "Implementation of 40 C/Resolution 67 and 211 EX/Decision 34 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"

21. 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.

22. The state of conservation of the Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town was presented to the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou/online, 2021), which adopted without debate and on a consensual basis Decision 44 COM 7A.16 to retain Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town on the List of World Heritage in Danger. A conservation management plan for Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town is being elaborated with assistance from the World Heritage Fund.

23. Since the 211th session of the Executive Board, the Secretariat has received a letter from the Permanent Delegation of Palestine to UNESCO dated 10 September 2021, addressing reported illegal excavations in Khirbet al-Taybeh, Tarqumiya, in the suburbs of Hebron/Al Khalil.

24. Information relating to the correspondence received during the reporting period is reflected in the Annex to this document.

Proposed draft decision

25. 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 212 EX/43 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 214th session, and invites the Director-General to submit to it a follow-up report thereon.

ANNEX I



Executive Board

Two hundred and twelfth session

212 EX/PX/DR.43.1
PARIS, 6 October 2021
Original: English

PROGRAMME AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMISSION (PX)

Item 43 OCCUPIED PALESTINE

DRAFT DECISION

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 212 EX/43,
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 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 twenty 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, 210 EX/Decision 36 and 211 EX/Decision 33, and the eleven 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, 43 COM/7A.22 and 44 COM/7A.10;

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 214th 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 214th 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
11 May 2021	Chairperson of the Arab Group to UNESCO	East Jerusalem (including the World Heritage property)
11 May 2021	Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	East Jerusalem (including the World Heritage property)
17 May 2021	Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	East Jerusalem (including the World Heritage property), and Gaza
31 May 2021	Chairperson of the Arab Group to UNESCO	East Jerusalem (including the World Heritage property), and Gaza
18 June 2021	Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir
11 July 2021	Ambassador of Israel to Multilateral Organizations	The Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
10 September 2021	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	Khirbet al-Taybeh
20 September 2021	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO and Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO	Al-Yousifieh Islamic Cemetery in Jerusalem