

PARIS, 11 May 2023
Original: English

Item 33 of the provisional agenda

OCCUPIED PALESTINE

SUMMARY

This document is submitted pursuant to 215 EX/Decision 36, by which the Executive Board decided to include the item entitled “Occupied Palestine” in the agenda of the 216th session. The present document provides a progress report on developments since the 215th session of the Executive Board.

There are no financial or administrative implications.

Decision required: paragraph 24.



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, 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 examined at the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee. It is noticeable that the pertaining decisions and resolutions of the Executive Board, the General Conference and the World Heritage Committee have been adopted on a consensual basis since October 2017.
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. Committed to building the long-term sustainability of the Centre, the Government of Norway renewed its support to UNESCO in 2020 for a new phase of the project, the aim of which is to make the center fully operational and autonomous through the restoration of the premises and the elaboration of a long-term conservation and management strategy. In that context, the Centre has benefited from the recruitment of five additional restorers and the appointment of four technical staff for the four specialized Units (Research, Outreach, Restoration laboratory, Catalogue and Digitization). The training of the staff and restoration of the premises are ongoing. Since October 2022, the capacities of the staff have been reinforced with the support of international and local experts through four training sessions held in presential on conservation and restoration procedures. The conservation assessment has been undertaken and the ten-year conservation and management strategies have been drafted. A new network infrastructure, as well as a fire security and climate control system have been installed. Digitization and inventory of the collections are also being undertaken both by the Research and Digitalization and Cataloguing Units.
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, the 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 215th session of the Executive Board, the Secretariat received a letter from the Chairperson of the Arab Group to UNESCO dated 4 January 2023, concerning a reported “blatant violation of relevant UNESCO conventions” at Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which is part of the World Heritage property. The letter referred to the respect of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two protocols, the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Secretariat followed up with Israel, asking it to provide relevant information. A reply has not been received yet.
6. Moreover, the Secretariat received two joint letters from the Permanent Delegations of Jordan and Palestine to UNESCO. The letters dated 10 March 2023 and 11 April 2023 respectively, concerned the prevailing situation at Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, part of the World Heritage property, including reported “construction works and excavations” as well as a reported “violation of the right to worship and the desecration of a Holy Site”. The letters referred 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. The letter of 11 April 2023 also referred to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Secretariat followed up with Israel, asking it to provide relevant information. A reply has not been received yet.

7. Finally, the Secretariat received six letters from the Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine to UNESCO, one dated 27 January 2023, reporting “vandalism at the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem”, the second one dated 7 February 2023, reporting “the destruction of a statue in the Church of the Flagellation”, the third one dated 21 March 2023 and the fourth one dated 30 March, both reporting “an attack on the Church of Gethsemane in East Jerusalem”, the fifth one dated 12 April 2023 and the sixth one dated 17 April 2023, both reporting “restrictions of access to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher”. The letters referred to the respect of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The letter dated 7 February 2023 also referred to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Secretariat followed up with Israel, asking it to provide relevant information. A reply has not been received yet.

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

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

9. The year 2022 marked 15 years of the blockade on the Gaza Strip. As a result, about 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza are ‘locked in’, the vast majority unable to access the remainder of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and the outside world, limiting access, notably, to higher education or cultural facilities, and hindering employment and economic opportunities. According to the OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023¹, recurrent escalation of hostilities, the most recent one in early August 2022, has heightened risks and exacerbated the vulnerabilities of young people in Gaza while rapid population growth coinciding with eroding development gains and limited resources have resulted in further deterioration of living standards and economic growth prospects in Gaza.

EDUCATION

10. In the framework of the TVET4Future project, funded by the Belgian Development Agency (Enabel), UNESCO has scaled up its support to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Gaza and completed the establishment and launching of “ConnecTech” TVET Innovation Hub in October 2022. The Innovation Hub aims at creating an enabling co-learning and co-working environment for youth pursuing a TVET track, especially in the digital technology sector. They benefit from a wide range of services and programmes that encourage collaboration, networking, and innovation on one hand, and enhance skills and competencies on the other hand to facilitate their access to the labour market. Through “ConnecTech”, a three-day Tech Innovation Bootcamp for 80 youth (29 women and 51 men) was conducted and a coaching and internship programme for 5 women was initiated.

11. Under the same project, UNESCO has also implemented a Training of Trainers (ToT) programme in Gaza in order to mainstream entrepreneurship, digital and green skills in TVET. This intervention included a needs assessment phase, a designing phase, a training phase and a coaching phase for 36 (15 women and 21 men) technical and vocational staff from the government, civil society, and the private sector.

12. Under the new project “Improving Student Skills for Innovation and Sustainable Development through STEAM² and Coding in Palestinian Schools,” funded by Japan, training on coding and

¹ OCHA 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-needs-overview-2023>

² Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.

artificial intelligence was provided to 28 teachers in the Gaza Strip. The teachers then trained 280 students in Gaza with a total of 60 training hours. The training targeted students of grades 5-11 using robotics kits provided by UNESCO. The overall aim of the project is to strengthen the skills of teachers and students in innovation and sustainable development through coding, artificial intelligence and robotics using a STEAM approach and project-based learning. Under the same project, UNESCO also supported the establishment of two vocational units on web and graphic design in secondary schools in Gaza.

13. Within the framework of the Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) funded by Education Cannot Wait, UNESCO has supported 40 schools in Gaza to provide learning in mathematics and Arabic for students from grades 1 to 4. The activities were designed to support the students in recovering the learning lost during the pandemic as well as to provide them with psychosocial support and benefitted a total of 4000 students in Gaza.

14. On 5 December 2022, UNESCO provided a training session to technical staff in Gaza on *Conceptualizing Disability-Inclusive Education in humanitarian context*, as part of a training organized by the Education Cluster and the international NGO Humanity and Inclusion (HI).

CULTURE

15. Through the UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF), UNESCO contributed to stabilizing and rehabilitating a historic building, Al Wehidi House in the old city of Gaza, to host the Basma Society for Culture and Arts that lost its premises during the 2021 escalation. Upon completion of works, the building was inaugurated on 20 September 2022, and the Basma Society moved in and started operating the building as its new premises.

16. UNESCO, in close coordination with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), partnered with the Première Urgence Internationale (PUI) to protect a recently discovered mosaics floor and archaeological site in Al Bureij area in the Gaza Strip. UNESCO's urgent intervention allowed for cleaning excavated pits onsite, providing proper cover of geotextile and sand as well as installing system to drain rainwater away from the site. A joint mission of UNESCO and PUI to the site took place on 11 January 2023 to monitor the urgent protection works of the mosaics. It was possible to acknowledge that works have been implemented according to the known standards and the excavated pits were covered and fully protected. In addition, the PUI scientific team presented the results of their evaluation of the site including the analysis of its boundaries and possible functions.

17. Regarding the Anthedon Harbour, a site on the Tentative List of Palestine, implementing protection and restoration interventions has been challenging due to the situation in the Gaza Strip. UNESCO will pursue its efforts to prepare a plan of intervention to conserve the part of the site along the seashore despite the prevailing difficult conditions.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

18. Information on UNESCO's work in this area is available in document 216 EX/34 "Implementation of 41 C/Resolution 51 and 215 EX/Decision 37 concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories".

GENDER EQUALITY

19. Information on UNESCO's work in this area is available in document 216 EX/34 "Implementation of 41 C/Resolution 51 and 215 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”

20. 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 the UNESCO Office in Ramallah and the World Heritage Centre to initiate a review of the draft statement of Outstanding Universal Value, which is currently underway.

21. 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. The elaboration of the conservation and management plan for Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town has been carried out with assistance from the World Heritage Fund.

22. Since the 215th session of the Executive Board, the Secretariat received two letters from the Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine to UNESCO dated 19 October 2022 and 26 April 2023 respectively, addressing reported violation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, at the World Heritage property of Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town. The Secretariat followed up with Israel asking it to provide relevant information in this regard. A reply has not been received yet.

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

Proposed draft decision

24. 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 216 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 217th session, and invites the Director-General to submit to it a follow-up report thereon.

ANNEX I



Executive Board
Two hundred and sixteenth session

216 EX/PX/DR.33.1
PARIS, 11 May 2023
Original: English

Item 33 OCCUPIED PALESTINE**DRAFT DECISION**

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 216 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 2023 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 three 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/Decision 19.1, 200 EX/Decision 25, 201 EX/Decision 30, 202 EX/Decision 38, 204 EX/Decision 25, 205 EX/Decision 28, 206 EX/Decision 32, 207 EX/Decision 38, 209 EX/Decision 24, 210 EX/Decision 36, 211 EX/Decision 33, 212 EX/Decision 43, 214 EX/Decision 22 and 215 EX/Decision 36, 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 217th 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 217th 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
19 October 2022	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Hebron/AI-Khalil Old Town
4 January 2023	Chairperson of the Arab Group to UNESCO	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
27 January 2023	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
7 February 2023	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
10 March 2023	Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Delegation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO and Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
21 March 2023	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Gethsemane Church in East Jerusalem
30 March 2023	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Gethsemane Church in East Jerusalem
11 April 2023	Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Delegation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO and Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
12 April 2023	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
17 April 2023	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
26 April 2023	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Hebron/AI-Khalil Old Town