

PARIS, 11 October 2024
Original: English

Item 33 of the provisional agenda

OCCUPIED PALESTINE

SUMMARY

This document is submitted pursuant to 219 EX/Decision 22, by which the Executive Board decided to include the item entitled “Occupied Palestine” on the agenda of the 220th session. The present document provides a progress report on developments since the 219th session of the Executive Board.

Decision required: paragraph 16.



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 was examined at the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee, held in July 2024. 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 continued to build the Centre’s capacities for 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 centre fully operational and autonomous through the restoration of the premises and the elaboration of a long-term conservation and management strategy. The capacities of the staff have been reinforced with the support of international and local experts on conservation and restoration procedures. Guidelines for manuscripts are also under preparation in Arabic and English. Restoration work, digitization and inventory of the collections continue to be undertaken by the specialized units. In addition, new storage safety cabinets have been designed and manufactured to enhance the preservation of manuscripts.
4. In the context of 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 areas of inventorying, cataloguing, basic conservation, restoration, photography and ICTs. Discussions had been initiated with the Jordan and Jerusalem Awqaf to continue supporting the Museum when the situation allows.
5. Since the 219th session of the Executive Board, the Secretariat received a joint letter from the Permanent Delegation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO and the Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine to UNESCO on 11 March 2024, regarding the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls. The letter expressed concern about recent transgressions at Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and reported on the installation of a communications tower on the roof of Al-Tankaziya school, which would have a visual impact on the site. The letter referred to the respect of relevant UNESCO’s international culture conventions. The Secretariat followed up with the State Party of Israel, asking it to provide relevant information. A response has not been received yet.
6. Moreover, the Secretariat received a letter from the Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine to UNESCO dated 24 April 2024, concerning the Palestine Archaeological Museum/Rockefeller Museum and the reported violation of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

7. The Secretariat also received a letter from the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) dated 17 July 2024 expressing concerns regarding the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls, and particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

8. In addition, the Secretariat received two letters from the Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine to UNESCO dated 15 July and 20 August 2024, concerning “Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir”, and the reported project to construct a settlement by Israel, which would have an impact on the property, thus posing serious threats to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Property. The Secretariat followed up with the State Party of Israel asking it to provide relevant information in this regard. A response has not been received yet.

9. The Secretariat also received a letter from the Permanent Delegation of the State of Palestine dated 29 July 2024 regarding reported violations in the site of Sebastia inscribed on the national Tentative List.

10. 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”

11. Information on UNESCO’s emergency response in Gaza since 7 October 2023 is included in document 220 EX/5.I.I as per General Conference Resolution “Impact and consequences of the current situation in the Gaza Strip/Palestine in all aspects of UNESCO’s mandate” (42 C/Resolution 54) and Executive Board Decision 219 EX/5.I.H.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

12. Information on UNESCO’s work in this area is available in document 220 EX/34 “Implementation of 42 C/Resolution 49 and 219 EX/Decision 23 concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories”.

GENDER EQUALITY

13. Information on UNESCO’s work in this area is available in document 220 EX/34 “Implementation of 42 C/Resolution 49 and 219 EX/Decision 23 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”

14. 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 the State 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.

15. The state of conservation of Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town was examined at the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee that was held in July 2024. It was adopted on a consensual basis.

Proposed draft decision

16. 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 220 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 221st session and invites the Director General to submit to it a follow-up report thereon.

ANNEX I

Executive Board
Two hundred and twentieth session

220 EX/PX/DR.33.1
PARIS, 11 October 2024
Original: English

PROGRAMME AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMISSION (PX)**Item 33 OCCUPIED PALESTINE****DRAFT DECISION**

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 220 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 2024 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 six 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, 215 EX/Decision 36, 216 EX/Decision 33, 217 EX/Decision 33 and 219 EX/Decision 22, and the thirteen 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, 44 COM/7A.10, 45 COM 7A.31, and 46 COM 7A.18;
8. Regrets the failure of the Israeli occupying authorities to cease the persistent excavations, tunnelling, works related to the Cable Car Project 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 in 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;

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 221st 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 221st 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 March 2024	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate 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
24 April 2024	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Palestine Archaeological Museum/Rockefeller Museum
15 July 2024	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir
17 July 2024	Director-General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO)	Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls
29 July 2024	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Sebastia
20 August 2024	Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO	Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir