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REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF GAZA: IMPLEMENTATION OF 185 EX/DECISION 37

SUMMARY

This document is presented in compliance with 185 EX/Decision 37. It summarizes progress made by UNESCO since the 185th session of the Executive Board in providing assistance to the reconstruction and development of the Gaza Strip.

There are no financial or administrative implications.

1. This document presents an update on the UNESCO response to the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip since the 185th session of the Executive Board. It covers the period from July 2010 to January 2011.
2. During the period under review and more than two years after this item was introduced on the agenda of the Executive Board, UNESCO continues to contribute to the United Nations' humanitarian response in Gaza, focusing specifically on educational needs of children and youth, as well as on the safety of local media professionals and promotion of freedom of expression. In the field of culture, UNESCO has contributed to the protection of cultural heritage sites at risk.
3. All activities were implemented through the Antenna Office, which remains housed in the UNDP compound in Gaza City, and falls under the direct supervision of the UNESCO Ramallah Office.

EDUCATION

4. Over the past six months, activities continued to focus on gap areas in the humanitarian response in the field of education, with particular emphasis on support to higher education institutions in Gaza and on the promotion of quality education in schools. These activities were made possible thanks to financial contributions from Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser of Qatar and from the Islamic Development Bank (the latter within the scope of the Programme of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip).

5. The following activities were implemented:

- (a) **Support to higher education:** UNESCO continued to support universities and students in need through a fee-waiver programme. These grants are currently being finalized for the second semester through the four participating universities.¹ Approximately 200 students have benefitted from these grants.

Taking into account the findings of a UNESCO assessment report regarding e-learning capacity in universities in Gaza, and following the agreement signed in August 2010 with the Islamic Development Bank, UNESCO began implementing the “Gaza Emergency Education Support Project to Faculties of Sciences at Universities Affected by the War”. This project focuses on providing much-needed material support for two universities in Gaza, with a particular focus on their science faculties. To date, a procurement assessment has been conducted and the bidding and procurement process are under way.

Finally, two professors from Al Aqsa University in Gaza were sponsored to attend the UNESCO PEACE conference in Barcelona (November 2010). The Programme for Palestinian European Academic Cooperation in Education (PEACE) promotes academic cooperation with Palestinian universities and this conference addressed, *inter alia*, the specific needs of universities in Gaza.

- (b) **Training on Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards:** Following the training of 700 educational staff through the UNESCO-INEE training courses that were completed in August 2010, an INEE Arabic language community of practice was established in Gaza. The community of practice is providing support for the development of emergency education contingency plans in at-risk communities. The community is also supporting the editing and translation of the revised Minimum Standards and other documents into Arabic. It is expected that these documents will be finalized in April 2011.
- (c) **Schools as safe zones:** Several activities have been undertaken under the auspices of this project. Planning for the Crisis-Disaster Risk Reduction Programme was completed in late 2010 and activities are currently being implemented. The Programme targets the 12 government schools located in the buffer zone (a restricted access area that extends along the perimeter of the Gaza Strip’s border with Israel, up to 1.5 kilometres inside Palestinian territory). These activities – implemented through local education focused NGOs – include first aid training; improving safety awareness and familiarizing with best safety practices; providing psychosocial support to teachers and students; and improving the monitoring and reporting of education violations. Training courses are ongoing at the school level and will be completed in July 2011.

6. Progress to date and the need for continued support through emergency education activities were stressed during the Annual Review Steering Committee meeting (UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, January 2011) which was held with Her Highness Sheikha Mozah’s Office (Qatar). Current needs for Gaza were also expressed in the 2011 Humanitarian Consolidated Appeals Process through two project submissions focused on technical and vocational education and psychosocial support for vulnerable teachers.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

7. Thanks to a generous contribution from Finland, UNESCO has entered into partnership with four local organizations focused on promoting freedom of expression, the safety of journalists and empowering women in the media.

¹ The Islamic University of Gaza, Al Azhar University, Al Aqsa University, and Al Quds University (Gaza).

8. Notably, as part of the safety training and provision of equipment for media professionals (implemented by MA'AN New Network), 63 protective vests and helmets were procured and distributed in December 2010 to media outlets and organizations in Gaza (and the West Bank). In March 2011, as part of the same project, 30 media professionals will benefit from a week-long training in stress management, psychosocial support and mental health, as well as first aid. Following the establishment of an agreement in December 2010 with the Birzeit Institute of Law, training workshops on freedom of expression and defending journalists' rights were organized for 30 law students in Gaza. Another training course will also take place in March 2011.

9. Other activities under the same programme focus on: (i) promoting freedom of expression through monitoring, reporting, peer support and networking, and legal aid for media professionals (implemented by MADA, The Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms); (ii) providing internship opportunities and capacity-building for young media professionals (through Birzeit University Media Development Centre); and (iii) establishing a peer support group for young women journalists (done in partnership with Filastiniyat, a non-governmental media advocacy organization). Given that these activities benefit the occupied Palestinian territory as a whole they are reported on in more detail in document 186 EX/34 on the educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories.

CULTURE

10. In cooperation with the French Consulate General in Jerusalem, the **Ecole Biblique archéologique française de Jérusalem** and the Islamic University in Gaza (IUG), the state of conservation of the Byzantine site of **Tell Umm Amer (Saint Hilarion Monastery)** was assessed and emergency protective measures initiated. The site is listed in the "Inventory of Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites of Potential Outstanding Universal Value in Palestine" of the Palestinian Authority and, as such, is a priority for Palestinian heritage conservation and enhancement. The measures undertaken aimed at protecting the mosaics and the archaeological remains from heavy rainfall and consolidating structures at risk of collapse thanks to the technical assistance made possible with funding from the French Consulate General in Jerusalem and the UNESCO regular programme. Also, 10 students in cultural heritage conservation-related disciplines at the IUG were offered an opportunity for practical training in conservation practices on the site.