



Réf:DP/20-01/DG/Hebron/17

Paris, the 17th January 2020.

Madam Director-General,

We are writing to you to express our dismay of the latest Israeli government decisions as declared by the Israeli defense minister Naftali Bennett to illegally build a new Israel settlement in the area of the Hebron/Al-Khalil fruit and vegetable market. Bennett gave the order that old Hebron/Al-Khalil market's existing buildings to be demolished to make way for new shops and residential Israeli settlers buildings. (<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-plans-new-jewish-neighborhood-in-hebron-s-abandoned-arab-market-1.8201992> and <https://www.timesofisrael.com/defense-minister-green-lights-new-jewish-neighborhood-in-hebron/>)

The Old Town of Hebron/Al-Khalil was inscribed in 2017 on the UNESCO World Heritage List in danger. The new Israeli settlement is to be erected in the core zone of the inscribed property. Such settlement will harmfully affect the OUV of the site and its attributes. If created, the settlement will have an irreversible negative effect on the distinctive character of the Old Town of Hebron/Al-Khalil in addition to the visual impact.

On November 19, during a UN special meeting, the United Nations special coordinator for the Middle East peace process has strongly denounced the US Secretary of State position in « legalizing » the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He maintained that it is a violation of the international law, reiterating the U.N. position under the Security Council resolution 2334 of December 2016 that settlements are a flagrant violation of international law.

The international community has long held that such settlements are a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. This decision of a new settlement in Hebron/Al-Khalil is also a clear violation of UNESCO cultural conventions, namely the Hague Convention of 1954 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 as well as the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Madam Director-General, we kindly ask you, in consideration of the above-mentioned facts, to urgently remind Israel, the occupying Power, of its obligations under international law and in particular under the above-mentioned UNESCO conventions. Please note that Israel, the occupying Power, is still a state party to the above-mentioned UNESCO conventions and it does not comply with its provisions.

Madam Director-General, we kindly ask you to annex this letter to the appropriate working document of the executive board in its 209th sessions.

Please accept, Madam Director-General, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mounir Anastas
Ambassador, Alternate Permanent Delegate

S. Exc. Mme. Audrey Azoulay
Directrice Générale de l'UNESCO
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Cc : President of the General Conference
Chairperson of the Executive Board
Assistant Director-General for Culture