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UNESCO'S ROLE IN SAFEGUARDING AND PRESERVING PALMYRA AND OTHER SYRIAN WORLD HERITAGE SITES

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 199th session of the Executive Board at the request of the Russian Federation and co-sponsored by Belarus, Brazil, China, France, Greece, India, Italy, Lebanon, Nigeria, Republic of Korea, Palau, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

The corresponding explanatory note is included in the document.

Action expected of the Executive Board: Proposed decision in paragraph 10.



EXPLANATORY NOTE

1. In the light of the recent expulsion of ISIL (Da'esh) from Palmyra – the city of priceless cultural heritage, the Russian Federation herewith submits this draft decision of the Executive Board, guided by the following considerations:

2. Resolution 38 C/48 “Reinforcement of UNESCO’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict”, adopted by the 38th session of the General Conference of UNESCO, is aimed at developing the capacity of the Organization in relation to conflict situations, particularly in the Middle East, where monuments of cultural heritage have been deliberately destroyed.

3. The expulsion of ISIL (Da'esh) from Palmyra, which was welcomed by the international community, took place practically on the eve of the 199th session of the Executive Board and calls on Member States to respond to it promptly and adequately on behalf of UNESCO.

4. It is time to take necessary concrete steps to provide effective assistance for the restoration of damaged and looted cultural properties.

5. Measures for restoring Palmyra and other damaged World Heritage sites due to armed conflict or disasters should be a priority in the forthcoming Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict.

6. In practical terms, UNESCO needs to monitor the situation at World Heritage and other significant sites in Syria in order to send, as soon as security conditions allow, UNESCO mission of international team of experts to assess the damage with a view to developing a concrete plan of necessary restoration and rehabilitation works.

7. We assume that the Steering Group will undertake the implementation of these tasks for Emergencies of the UNESCO Secretariat in close cooperation with the Group of Friends of the Coalition “Unite4Heritage”.

8. A decision “UNESCO’s Role in the Safeguarding and Preserving Palmyra and other Syrian World Heritage sites” would be a worthy response of UNESCO to safeguard and preserve Syria’s heritage.

9. We count on the support and co-sponsorship by a wide range of Member States.

10. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling that the purpose of UNESCO is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations,
2. Recalling the provisions of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995), the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and other relevant international agreements,

3. Recalling 38 C/Resolution 48 of the General Conference, and 197 EX/Decision 10 and 196 EX/Decision 29 of the Executive Board,
4. Recalling also Resolution 2199 of the United Nations Security Council,
5. Recalling further decisions 39 COM7 and 37 COM8C.1 of the World Heritage Committee,
6. Taking note of the Bonn Declaration on the World Heritage of 29 June 2015 and the St. Petersburg Declaration on the Protection of Culture in Armed Conflict Zones of 16 December 2015,
7. Noting with appreciation the efforts of the international community to safeguard and preserve the world's cultural heritage in danger,
8. Condemning the destruction of cultural heritage in Syria particularly by ISIL (Da'esh) and ANF, whether such destruction is incidental or deliberate, including targeted destruction of religious sites and objects and noting with concern that ISIL (Da'esh), ANF and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida, are generating income from engaging directly or indirectly in the looting and smuggling of cultural heritage items from archaeological sites, museums, libraries, archives, and other sites in Iraq and Syria, which is being used to support their recruitment efforts and strengthen their operational capability to organize and carry out terrorist attacks,
9. Welcoming the expulsion of ISIL (Da'esh) from the Site of Palmyra,
10. Paying tribute to cultural heritage experts and professionals at risk,
11. Requests the Director-General to ensure the inclusion of safeguarding and preservation of Palmyra and other damaged World Heritage sites in Syria such as Aleppo in the forthcoming Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO's action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict;
12. Urges the Director-General to promote broad participation in and coordination of the efforts among States, United Nations and its agencies, as well as other partner organizations, in restoring damaged Syrian World Heritage and other significant sites in accordance with the relevant provisions of international law and when the security situation allows;
13. Calls on Member States to provide voluntary contributions and assistance through UNESCO for assessing the damage, and restoring and preserving Palmyra monuments and other World Heritage sites of Syria when the security situation allows;
14. Invites the Director-General to send a UNESCO mission of international experts to Palmyra and other damaged significant sites in Syria such as Aleppo when the security situation allows, to be funded by voluntary contributions from Member States and the Emergency Heritage Fund, as appropriate, so as to assess by means of documentation and inventory the extent of damages and to identify urgent needs in terms of conservation, restoration, and safeguarding with a view toward the long-term sustainability and integrity of Palmyra and other significant sites, such as Aleppo, and to ensure the presentation of a preliminary report on the situation at an information meeting of the Executive Board to be convened for this purpose, upon completion of the mission.