



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

The Assistant Director-General for Culture

Prof. Mazin Qumsiyeh
Director and Professor
Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and
Sustainability, Bethlehem University
P.O. Box 9-Mar Andrea Campus
Bethlehem
Palestine

14 November 2019

Ref.: CLT/WHC/ARB/19/9892

Dear Professor Qumsiyeh,

On behalf of the Director-General, I wish to thank you for your letter of 17 September last by which you inform UNESCO of environmental and other threats that are affecting Al-Makhrour Valley within the World Heritage property of *Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir*, inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger since 2014.

We have taken due note of this information, which will be taken into account for the review of the state of conservation report of the property that will be prepared for the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee in 2020. Your concerns will also be brought to the attention of the State of Israel.

I wish to assure you that UNESCO stands ready to take all necessary measures that are in accordance with the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention and within our mandate in this regard. In the meantime, we invite you to continue to transmit to us any further relevant information that may arise.

Thanking you for your commitment to the protection of cultural heritage, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Ernesto Ottone R.

cc: Palestinian National Commission for Education, Culture and Science
UNESCO Office, Ramallah

BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY

Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability



جامعة بيت لحم
معهد فلسطين للتنوع الحيوي والاستدامة

P.O. Box 9- Bethlehem-Palestine
Mar Andrea Campus
Tel./Fax. +(970) 2277 3553
Email info@palestinature.org
<http://www.palestinature.org>



ص.ب. ٩ - بيت لحم - فلسطين

مار أندريا

تلفاكس +(970) 22773553

إيميل info@palestinature.org

<http://www.palestinature.org>

17 Sept 2019

Her Excellency Ms. Audrey Azoulay
Director General, UNESCO

We write to you to ask that you intervene to stop the environmental and other attacks on a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Al-Makhrour Valley, is the last remaining biodiversity-rich area in the Bethlehem district, natural areas interspersed with ancient forms of agriculture and rich flora and fauna including endangered species (report from Bethlehem University's Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability). This area is one of 13 Important Bird Areas in the Palestinian Areas. It is rich in cultural heritage, including old Roman tombs, ancient wells, old Palestinian farm watchtowers/houses some dating to Roman and Canaanite times. A management plan was produced by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism (section in charge of administering WHSs) in cooperation with the Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, and other local agencies (as well as Bethlehem University through the Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability).

The area suffers from diverse pressures that we are addressing including habitat loss and land fragmentation. The component of the threat caused by Palestinian development is addressed through the management plan and working with local people for example to encourage permaculture and ecotourism. But in the past few months more significant threats materialized including opening an Israeli settler road and a new Jewish settlement outpost established on top of the hill (see Fig. 1) as well as plans by the Israeli occupation authority to expand route 60 in the this area (the so called Tunnel Road). This is all in the heart of the WHS area and significantly impacts the landscape. Soldiers have also demolished Palestinian homes in the area (Fig. 2) and settlers have set fire to other farm houses (Fig. 3).

We call on UNESCO and on the Israeli authorities to immediately intervene to protect this WHS from development that is not in line with the management plan of this site.

Sincerely

Mazin Qumsiyeh, Director and Professor
Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability, Bethlehem University

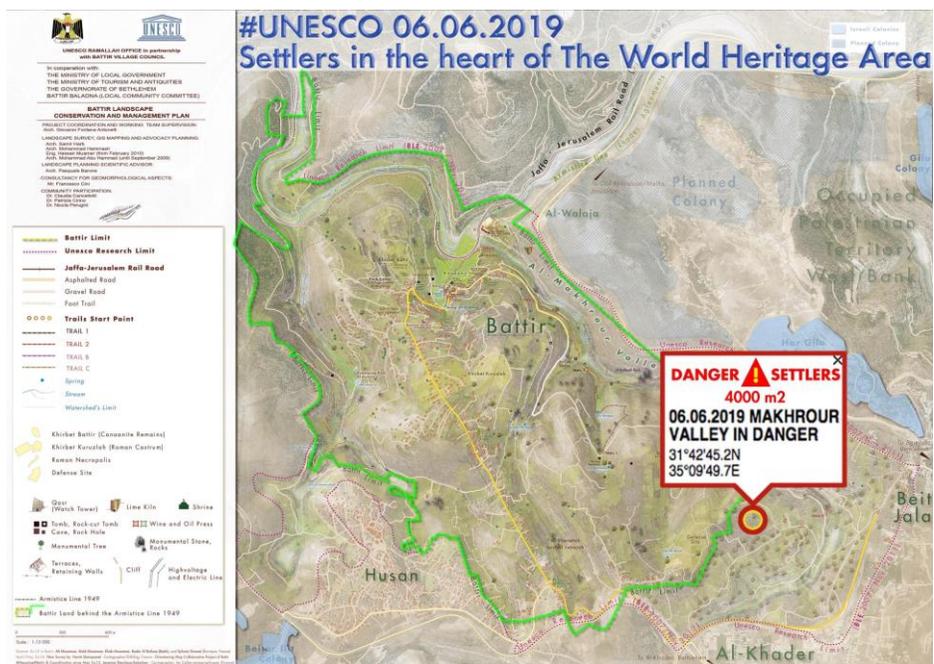


Fig. 1. Location of new Israeli settler outpost



Fig. 2. Israeli soldiers and settlers breaking into area and engaged in road clearing etc.



Fig. 3. Palestinian home destroyed by Israeli occupation forces in the area



Fig. 4 Palestinians engaged in voluntary work to repair farm house torched by settlers 1 Sept 2019