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REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON UNESCO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LEBANON

SUMMARY

This document is presented in compliance with 179 EX/Decision 43. It summarizes progress achieved by UNESCO, since the 179th session of the Board, in providing assistance in favour of the reconstruction and development in Lebanon within the Organization's fields of competence.

Financial and administrative implications: none.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 14.

INTRODUCTION

1. The period of reporting witnessed important political developments in Lebanon. On 21 May 2008, after months of political stalemate, an agreement was reached in Doha by Lebanese leaders under the auspices of the Arab League, to elect a president, establish a national unity cabinet and address the electoral law. Subsequently on 25 May 2008, Mr Michel Sleiman was elected as President of the Republic, putting an end to the constitutional void that had endured in Lebanon since November 2007. In the aftermath of the election, the United Nations Secretary-General welcomed this important event as a crucial step towards “national reconciliation, political stability, peace and progress for all of Lebanon’s people and for the future of their country”. He urged “all Lebanese parties to press ahead together in consolidating the sovereignty, stability and political independence of the Lebanese State, in accordance with the Taif accord and relevant Security Council resolutions”. In the congratulatory letter addressed to the newly elected president, the Director-General of UNESCO conveyed UNESCO’s commitment to strengthening the Organization’s support to Lebanon.

2. It should be noted that the high-level intersectoral mission to Lebanon charged by the Director-General to devise a reinforced programme of assistance could not be fielded in May 2008 as initially scheduled, owing to the prevailing situation on the ground. Following the presidential election, a new date has been agreed upon and the mission will proceed to Lebanon in late August 2008. An addendum to document 180 EX/48 will be submitted to notify the Executive Board of the main mission results.

UNESCO’S ASSISTANCE SINCE THE 179th EXECUTIVE BOARD SESSION

3. During the period under review, UNESCO’s assistance mainly focused on: (i) mitigating the psychological, social and material impact of the conflict; (ii) rehabilitating cultural heritage affected by the 2006 conflict; and (iii) promoting intercultural dialogue, especially among youth.

4. The following activities and projects were completed, continued or launched during the reporting period, mainly by the UNESCO Office in Beirut.

Education

5. The **Post-war psychosocial support programme** for children and youth traumatized by the 2006 conflict was continued, in close cooperation with UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, local NGOs and municipalities from Northern and Southern Lebanon. In the period of reporting, training in psychological and social support was organized for 150 social animators, who will conduct workshops in July and August 2008 to the benefit of more than 3,000 children and local communities. A handbook on “Learning to contribute to reconstruction” was developed and distributed to schools involved in the project.

6. In addition to the three previously submitted projects in the field of education referred to in document 170 EX/43 (para. 8), two new project proposals have been submitted to the UNDG Lebanon Recovery Fund and are currently being considered for funding: **Friendly one-classroom school model to reintegrate drop-out children in basic education** (\$450,000) and **Improving the quality of civics, citizenship and life-skills education in Lebanon** (\$350,000).

Culture

7. Within the context of the project on **Capacity-building of human resources for digital documentation of World Heritage sites affected by the war** (\$767,226 funded by the UNDG Lebanon Recovery Fund), procurement of required equipment was launched and initial contacts were established with relevant international institutions for the provision of the necessary training.

8. A new project on **Cultural reconciliation for Lebanese youth** (\$211,389 funded by Norway) was launched. The project aims to establish a solidarity network among Lebanese youth as a means of promoting dialogue and reconciliation. “Discussion sessions” will be organized during the summer of 2008 in five regions of Lebanon, involving ten high school classes and 300 students with different cultural and religious backgrounds. The topics under discussion, agreed upon in close coordination with the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO, will focus on shared heritage, traditions, history, religion and citizenship, and seek to promote a shared awareness of common fundamental values, mutual understanding and respect.

9. Efforts are ongoing to bring together, under the leadership of Mr Louis Boisset, holder of the UNESCO Chair on Interfaith Studies, Faculty of Religious Sciences of the Saint Joseph University of Beirut, a group of experts representing all Lebanese spiritual sensibilities for the elaboration of a teachers’ manual to help identify and overcome obstacles to inter-religious understanding.

10. Following the nomination of Beirut as **World Book Capital 2009**, negotiations are under way with different stakeholders, book chain representatives and the publishing sector to finalize the related programme of activities.

Natural sciences

11. Within the framework of the **Programme for reducing earthquake losses in the Eastern Mediterranean region** (RELEMR), scientists and engineers from the Lebanese Geophysical Centre have participated in a workshop organized by UNESCO in May 2008 in Turkey. Participants from the Mediterranean region discussed regional approaches to improve seismic data and earthquake risk mitigation.

Communication and information

12. In cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, local and international NGOs as well as the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives, a new project was launched aimed at setting up and supporting a **mobile library** for the benefit of students and out of school youth in Beirut and its southern suburbs. A bus was purchased, books acquired and catalogued, relevant staff trained and participating schools involved. The bus had its first trip in early June.

13. Following approval by the Lebanese authorities concerned, a new project was submitted to the UNDG Lebanon Recovery Fund on **IT capacity development for education reform** (\$820,000).

Action expected of the Executive Board

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

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 179 EX/Decision 43,
2. Having examined document 180 EX/49,
3. Notes the progress made by UNESCO in contributing to the reconstruction of Lebanon;
4. Invites the Director-General to report to it at its 181st session, as part of his general report under item 5 “Report of the Director-General on the follow-up to decisions and resolutions adopted by the Executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions”.



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REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON UNESCO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LEBANON

ADDENDUM

SUMMARY

As announced in document 180 EX/49, this addendum reports on the high-level intersectoral mission to Lebanon, entrusted by the Director-General with the task of devising a reinforced programme of assistance for the country.

1. The high-level intersectoral mission to devise a reinforced programme of assistance for Lebanon, initially foreseen in document 175 EX/INF.14, but repeatedly postponed owing to the prevailing situation on the ground, was dispatched to the country from 27 to 29 August last. This mission, led by the Deputy Director-General, included the Assistant Director-General for Education, the Director for Disaster Reduction and Renewable Energy Section of the Natural Sciences Sector, the Director of the UNESCO Beirut Office and a representative from the Post-Conflict Operations Unit within the Bureau of Field Coordination. The purpose of the mission was to:

- (a) identify elements of a comprehensive UNESCO programme of assistance for Lebanon's reconstruction taking into account national priorities within UNESCO's fields of competence and major ongoing UNESCO assistance, including:
 - possible reinforcement of areas of ongoing assistance;
 - new areas drawing on UNESCO's established expertise and delivery capacity, notably its past experience and know-how in post-conflict situations;
- (b) explore the feasibility of a joint UNESCO/Lebanon mechanism for fund mobilization; and
- (c) prepare the ground for subsequent technical missions to develop a fully-fledged programme of assistance and details of the mobilization mechanism for the above-mentioned joint UNESCO/Lebanon fund.

2. The Lebanese authorities greatly welcomed the mission and accorded it special attention as demonstrated by its programme, which included meetings with government officials at the highest level, namely: Mr Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic; Mr Fouad Siniora, Prime Minister; Mr Fawzi Salloukh, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ms Bahia Hariri, Minister of Education and Higher Education; Mr Tarek Mitri, Minister of Information; and Mr Tammam Salam, Minister of Culture. There was general acknowledgement among these officials that UNESCO's areas of competence were at the core of the country's reconstruction efforts and all regarded renewed and strengthened support from the Organization in this endeavour as highly valuable. The mission also met the President and the Secretary-General of the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) as well as the President, Secretary-General and members of the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO. In addition, meetings were held with the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Ms Marta Ruedas, and with members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT).

3. Discussions with relevant line ministries and institutions confirmed the timeliness and relevance of developing a more ambitious and comprehensive programme of assistance for Lebanon's reconstruction, based on a two-pronged approach: the country's long-term strategic priorities in the Organization's fields of competence, coupled with concrete short-term actions and projects aimed at addressing more immediate recovery needs. Initial agreement was reached on articulating the comprehensive programme around the following main programmatic orientations:

Education: Cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in further refining its national five-year strategy, focusing particularly on quality of higher education with the establishment of quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms and related capacity-building. In addition, large-scale projects in support of the Ministry's strategy will be continued (i.e. "IT Capacity Development for Education Reform (CaDER)", \$820,000 funded by the Lebanon Recovery Fund (LRF); and "Supporting Gender Equality in Education", \$750,000 funded by Italy), while projects in the pipeline with the Lebanon Recovery Fund (LRF) will be implemented as soon as funds become available (i.e. "Supporting the Ministry of Education efforts to institutionalize inclusive education", \$1 million; "Civic, Citizenship and Life Skills Education", \$500,000; "Reintegration of drop-out children in basic education through innovative educational modalities in affected areas and Palestinian camps in Lebanon", \$450,000; and "Restoring Livelihood in the Affected Areas in Lebanon through Multi-Purpose Community Learning Centres", \$450,000).

Natural sciences: Cooperation with the CNRS in furthering its priority areas, namely: (a) creation of an Observatory of Science, Technology and Innovation (OSTI) as recommended in the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) for Lebanon, initially developed with UNESCO's assistance and launched by the Director-General in April 2006; (b) reinforcement of national surveillance and sustainable management of the coastal region, including monitoring of pollution impact – notably the effects of the oil spill which struck the Lebanese coast in summer 2006 – on marine biodiversity and public health; and (c) assessment and mitigation of earthquake and tsunami risks and related risk awareness programmes, as well as support to the CNRS Geophysical Research Centre for the active involvement of Lebanon in related regional networks.

Culture: Cooperation with the Ministry of Culture in its efforts to define overall cultural policies based on the concepts of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and related statistics, as well as in further enhancing tangible and intangible heritage safeguarding and protection and promoting cultural industries, notably the revitalization of the book industry within the framework of the nomination of Beirut as World Book Capital 2009. In this connection, two specific high-profile projects, focusing on support to the establishment of an Underwater Archaeology Centre in Tyre and to the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music (LNHCM), were discussed.

Communication: Cooperation with the Ministry of Information, media institutions and practitioners in establishing self-regulatory codes of ethics, as well as media accountability

systems for monitoring breaches to the recently developed draft Media Charter. Building the technical capacities of the National News Agency was also identified as an area for cooperation under the comprehensive programme.

Multidisciplinary intersectoral components of the comprehensive programme for the reconstruction of Lebanon: initial agreement was also reached on two broad areas for UNESCO's cooperation and support during the mission:

- (i) comprehensive strategy to address early recovery, reconstruction and sustainable development in areas that have been suffering from endemic poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, child labour and environmental degradation, as well as armed conflicts and violence causing widespread destruction and displacement of inhabitants and a sense of desperation among the affected population. Such strategies would involve quality education for all, vocational education (with particular focus on traditional industries and handicrafts), empowerment for employment, conflict resolution, citizenship-building and community services, all areas in which UNESCO could provide support at the design and implementation stages through an intersectoral approach. Agreement was reached to develop such a strategy in the Bab Al Tabbaneh district of Tripoli, Northern Lebanon, as proposed by the Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO and endorsed by the Ministry of Culture;
- (ii) strategies and activities for cultural reconciliation among university students, seen as the human capital of the country and the reservoir of its future leaders, in order to safeguard them from conflicts and divisions and strengthen their commitment to national unity. The approach to be devised would involve understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity, dialogue and conflict resolution. It should be noted that this area of cooperation, proposed by the Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO and endorsed by the Ministry of Culture, is at the centre of the mandate of UNESCO's intersectoral platform "Contributing to the dialogue among civilizations and cultures and a culture of peace" which aims, *inter alia*, at engaging new voices (notably youth) in intercultural understanding and interfaith dialogue.

4. On the basis of the above, and in order to design the new fully-fledged programme and related specific projects, the UNESCO Beirut Office and programme sectors at Headquarters through appropriate technical missions, will engage in further consultations with the ministries and national institutions concerned. It is envisaged that this phase will be completed by the end of 2008.

5. It is worth highlighting the fact that the Lebanese Prime Minister agreed to the principle of establishing a joint UNESCO/Lebanon mechanism for fund mobilization once the comprehensive programme and related projects are finalized. This mechanism initially proposed by UNESCO was also welcomed by the ministers met during the mission. The synergy of efforts would provide more leverage in raising sufficient extrabudgetary resources for the implementation of the programme. It was also agreed that the detailed terms of reference and working methods of this mechanism would be defined in parallel to the development of the programme.

6. The mission provided an opportunity for the Deputy Director-General to exchange views with the Minister of Culture on the membership of the governing board of the International Centre for Human Sciences (ICHHS) based in Byblos (Byblos Centre), which falls under his authority. An agreement was signed between UNESCO and the Lebanese authorities in April 2007 to reflect 167 EX/Decision 4.5, following which the Byblos Centre became a category 2 centre, with its director being appointed by the governing board. It was mutually agreed to accelerate the process of jointly approving the board members so that the Byblos Centre could rapidly benefit from the renewed drive expected from a new director.