



*Palestine Association On Monuments And Sites*  
**الجمعية الفلسطينية للمعالم و المواقع التاريخية**

*National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)*

**Initial Report on the Cultural Heritage Devastations in Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Documentation and gathering some of evidences during the humanitarian truce (24 Nov – 30 Nov, 2023)**



**Prepared by: ICOMOS Palestine**

**Information collected from:** Palestinian Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities (MoTA), Palestinian Ministry of Culture (MoC), Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH), and testimonies by the staff of Gaza Municipality.

**30 November 2023**

The following is a preliminary report developed based on the initial information communicated by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), Palestinian Ministry of Culture (MoC), Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH), information received from our field colleagues working on the ground from Gaza, testimonies by the staff of Gaza Municipality despite the difficulty of communicating with most of them, due to the difficulty in accessing Gaza, and the isolation of this area from the internet communication, as well as the limited resources for remote investigation.

Since the war declaration against Gaza on October 8th, and until the humanitarian truce took effect on November 24th, Gaza Strip witnessed a total interruption of electricity, water and food, with lengthy and repetitive internet interruptions.

Most of the information from Gaza has reached us through mobile phone messages and the news. These short text messages and recorded raw videos documented several evidences about a genocidal war, illegal siege and tremendous human suffering.

This is a brief and preliminary account about the situation of the cultural heritage in Gaza. It will be regularly updated until it will be finalized after complete ceasefire in Gaza and the rest of the occupied territories. Here is the latest information to the date of this report about the direct attacks on human civilians, especially women and children, and regarding attacks on tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Gaza and the West Bank.

The number of Palestinian victims has reached terrifying and shocking figures. **More than 14800 people have been reported as killed, including more than 6000 children, more than 4000 women, and 695 elderly people. At least 30,000 were injured, and more than 4,500 people are missing.** There may still be people alive under the rubbles. Several survivors have been rescued from under the collapsed buildings with very primitive tools and sometimes the rescue teams and family members were unearthing survivors with their bare hands. Many corpses are decomposing under the rubbles, which in itself is a threat of a huge health catastrophe ahead.

The frenetic, furious and indiscriminated bombing of Gaza is meant to destroy life. Any form of life: children, women, elderlies, doctors, rescuers, journalists, humanitarian activists... All forms of life are a pursued target of the Israeli bombs and missiles. **More than half of Gaza's population (1.5 million people) was displaced to the south.** The Israelis used most of the weapons and war methods prohibited by the Geneva Convention and all relevant conventions. Their aim is to eradicate life in Gaza, as well as its heritage, history, memories and archives. Israel is ethnic cleansing the Palestinian people physically and erasing its history and memory.

The Israeli occupying forces have been committing their crimes without stopping for more than 50 days before the start of the temporary truce. It is not possible to accurately determine or describe all damages. Homes, schools, hospitals, religious buildings, universities, museums, farmland and all other facilities have been destroyed. In addition to all these acts of genocide, the Israeli Minister of Heritage "Amihai Ben-Eliyahu "has publicly called for a nuclear bombing against Gaza. ICOMOS Palestine has published a statement on November 7<sup>th</sup> denouncing this statement, which is attached also below.

**According to the initial information from the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities** on November 19, widespread attacks have targeted the cultural heritage in Gaza including but not limited to:

1. **Anthedon port:** This site is on the tentative list of World Heritage. It was targeted from the air and sea and many of its parts were destroyed.
2. **Al-Omari Mosque in the city of Jabalia:** This mosque was completely destroyed.
3. The minaret of the **Al-Omari Mosque in Gaza.**
4. The Minaret of **the Court Mosque (Shuja'iya)** was completely destroyed.
5. **Saint Porphyries Greek Orthodox Church:** This church is located along Omar Mukhtar Street in Gaza City in the Zaytun Quarter of the Old City). It dates back to the Byzantine period and was built in the fifth century. It is considered one of the oldest churches in the world. Parts of the buildings attached to the main structure were destroyed.
6. **Byzantine Church of Jabalya:** This church was completely destroyed
7. The **Khanyounis Museum** and the **Rafah Museum:** were completely destroyed along with other museums and large parts of their collections were also destroyed or are missing.
8. A group of **historical neighborhoods** in Gaza, including Al-Zaytoun, Al-Daraj, and Al-Shuja'iya, were heavily destroyed.
9. **Roman-era cemetery** in Gaza suffered severe damage
10. **Saint Hilarion (Tell Umm Amer):** This site is inscribed on the tentative list of World Heritage. The surrounding area and the road connecting the site were destroyed.
11. **Two laboratories for the restoration and maintenance of archaeological manuscripts** were completely destroyed
12. **Al-Saqqa House:** is a historic house very known in Gaza. It was completely destroyed.
13. Most parts of the Old City of Gaza were also exposed to the freneting bombing. This area contains 146 old houses in addition to mosques, churches, and historical markets, schools, as well as the old port of Gaza. We still do not have precise indications about the extent of the affected buildings.

**Based on the information provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture on November 8<sup>th</sup>:**

The Gaza Strip has been subjected to multi-purpose attacks; some of which targeted many creative people in the Gaza Strip - (children and adults)

- 1- Initial information up to the date of the report revealed that 15 artists were killed (*please see their names and their stories in the attached report of MoC*). There are stories about musicians who lost their ability to hear, and painters who lost their limbs. There are so many artists and intellectuals, some of whom were traveling and could not re-enter the Palestinian territories or the Gaza Strip. Some of those lost many of their family members.
- 2- Many cultural centers were destructed, among which five publishing houses and bookstores, six cultural centers, in addition to the collapse of many cultural and artistic institutions.

Indeed, there is no institution that was not exposed to even partial damage. Many cultural institutions have been turned into refugee camps to shelter the displaced.

**The situation in West Bank:**

Between October 7<sup>th</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup>, many Israeli settler attacks and military raids against Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were recorded. Israeli forces killed more than 240 Palestinians there. Over 3000 Palestinians were injured, mainly in Jenin and Tulkarem governorates.

Since October 7<sup>th</sup>, the Israeli authorities have heavily restricted the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank by using military checkpoints, concrete roadblocks, and deployed military personnel. Even though, no evidence that people from the West Bank were involved in the 7<sup>th</sup> of October events, this is another point yet to reflect that the Israeli actions are against all Palestinians.

**Regarding the Cultural Heritage in the West Bank:**

- 1- Israeli settlers, backed by security, move to seize property in Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter.
- 2- In Hebron, (a World Heritage Sites), closures and restrictions are imposed on its population access by the Israeli occupation, in addition to attacks by the Israeli settlers.
- 3- The Refugee Camps in Jenin and Ein Shams in Tulkarem have got their infrastructure intentionally destroyed by the Israeli tanks. Moreover, repeated invasions of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank are carried out by the Israeli occupying forces. Before October 7<sup>th</sup>, there were more than 5,000 prisoners detained in the Israeli jails. This number has approximately reached 7,000 detainees since October 7<sup>th</sup>, with hundreds of children who are subjected to inhumane treatment in prisons, including deprivation of food and physical and mental torture.

The attacks on the territories in area C, which constitute 60% of the West Bank, the burning of Palestinian fields and crops, the displacement of Bedouins and the killing of their livestock, are part of the occupation's daily barbaric and fascist practices against the Palestinian people, before and after October 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Some of evidences about the attacks took place have been illustrated through photographs, taken by colleagues on the ground in Gaza. it appears to be a major destruction of cultural, historical, natural and intangible heritage sites. Many institutions, organizations and researchers have individually and independently documented these attacks, especially against the museums. It is not possible to conduct a validated assessment of the expected damage before having a permanent ceasefire in order to document the damages and protect the remaining of Gaza's ancient heritage.**

| Item | Name of the site             | Location  | Damage percentage |
|------|------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1.   | souq Al-Zawiya               | Al-Daraj quarter of Old City                                  | Completely        |
| 2.   | Saint Porphyries church      | Al- Zaytun Quarter of the Old City                            | Partially         |
| 3.   | The Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital | Between the Shujaiya and Zeitoun quarters in Gaza's Old City. | Partially         |

|    |  |                                      |             |
|----|--|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| 4. | <b>El- Saqa Palace</b>                     | The north of Gaza's Old City         | Completely  |
| 5. | <b>Beit E-Tarzi</b>                        | Outside the borders of Old Gaza City | Completely  |
| 6. | <b>The Rashad Al-Shawa Cultural Center</b> | In a Rimal neighborhood- North Gaza. | Completely  |
| 7. | <b>The Central Archives</b>                | Municipality of Gaza                 | Completely  |
| 8. | <b>Al- Omari Mosque- Gaza</b>              | Daraj Quarter - Old City of Gaza     | Partially   |
| 9. | <b>Al Omari mosque, Jabaliya</b>           | Jabaliya in the North of Gaza city   | High damage |

**Some details:**

**1) Souq Al-Zawiya: Al-Zawiya market is one of the oldest markets in the center of Gaza City**

Al-Zawiya market is known as one of the archaeological sites established in the Old City. It also represents an architectural and engineering style that suits the climate around. Al-Zawiya market remains the first destination for those fasting to go shopping to enjoy the atmosphere of the holy month of Ramadan.

Al-Zawiya market is located on the eastern side of what is known as Old Gaza where it is adjacent to the eastern side of the Great Omari Mosque which is the largest and oldest mosque in the Strip. It is also adjacent from its northern side to Al-Daraj quarter which is the largest and oldest neighborhood of the Old City and from the south it is adjacent to Omar Al-Mukhtar Street the largest street in the city that connects its east to its west. It is also adjacent from the western side by Fahmi Bek Street and Palestine Square which is the most famous square in the Strip.

Souq Al-Zawiya was destroyed after it was bombed by Israeli occupation aircraft during the war on Gaza 2023





Souk Al-Zawiya Before October 7<sup>th</sup>



Souk Al-Zawiya, After October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023

## 2) Saint Porphyrius: The Resilient Elegance of Saint Porphyrius Church in Gaza

Nestled within the enchanting Zaytun Quarter of the Old City, the Church of Saint Porphyrius stands as a symbol of enduring faith. This venerable place of worship is not only the Orthodox Christian heart of Gaza but also lays claim to being one of the city's oldest continuously active churches. Named in honor of the esteemed 5th-century bishop of Gaza, Saint Porphyrius, this sacred edifice safeguards his final resting place, gracefully ensconced in its northeastern corner. The Church of Saint Porphyrius, a majestic testament to Byzantine art and architecture, was constructed during the early 5th century AD. Centuries later, it underwent a remarkable revival during the Crusaders' era, around the mid-12th century AD. Throughout its history, this spiritual sanctuary has been restored numerous times, with significant works during the late Ottoman era in 1856. Adjacent to the St. Porphyrius Church, the minaret of Kateb al-Welaya Mosque can be seen Welayat Mosque is a small historic mosque built by the Mamluks in 1432.

Tragically, on October 19, 2023, the Church's surroundings were the scene of the Israeli bombardments, ushering in yet another devastating cycle of destruction. This harrowing event resulted in the loss of numerous innocent lives, including those who sought shelter within the church and its adjoining sanctuaries. Most of the victims were from the frail Christian community of Gaza.



Interior of the Church before October 2023

The Church after the Bombing

### 3) Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital: Gaza's oldest hospital.

Al-Ahli Arab Hospital is located in Gaza's Old City between the Shujaiya and Zeitoun neighborhoods. The facility is also close to several historical sites in Gaza, including the Great Omari Mosque, known as Gaza's Great Mosque and two of Gaza's churches: St Philip the evangelist chapel and St Porphyrius Church. The area is also in proximity to Gaza's historic Zawiya Market. Al-Ahli is one of the oldest hospitals in Gaza founded in 1882, and it serves more than 45,000 patients each year.



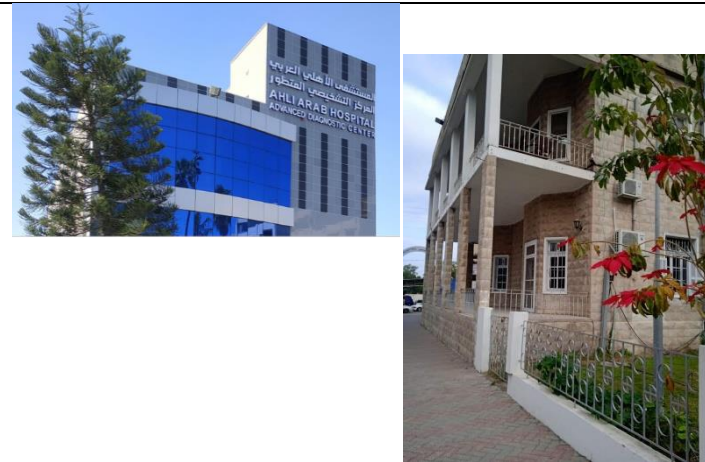
On October 19, 2023, A massacre occurred as a result of the Israeli aerial bombardment in the courtyard of hospital, *“The devastation witnessed, coupled with the sacrilegious targeting of the church, strikes at the very core of human decency. We assert unequivocally that this is deserving international condemnation and retribution,”* the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem, which runs the hospital, said in a statement.



The picture taken by 1916



The Hospital after the Bombing



The Hospital before October 2023.



The Hospital building after the Bombardment of October 2023



The press conference held by the Hospital director between the dead bodies of the victims.

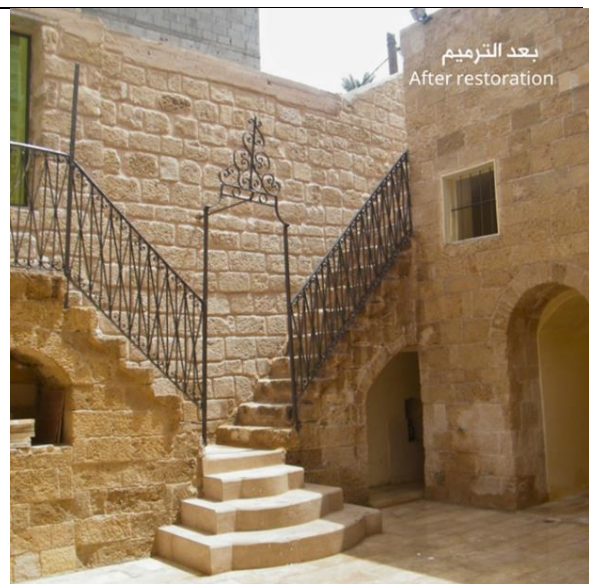


#### **4) Qasr E-saqqa (El- Saqqa Palace): EL SAQQA family great and historic house - Gaza City**

Original construction of the house dates back to 1661. It was an example of traditional Islamic Mamluk period architecture with an L-shaped entrance, the courtyard, iwan, cross-vault ceiling, yuk (wall storage) and ornamentation. A few years ago some renovation work started with locals being hired and trained in removing recent additions such as cement plaster and concrete walls. After three years in search of funds, work started on the restoration which was carried out during the siege making it difficult to acquire the needed materials at a reasonable price. The house was approximately 700 square metres, and included exhibition and events spaces and a cafe. The house was gifted by the whole El Saqqa family as a hub for culture to maintain and preserve Palestinian heritage by supporting artists, organizations and their art through various cultural projects and exhibitions, and has become one of the most important cultural centers in Gaza City. Even with the constant threat of invasion, shelling and closures, it has managed to remain vibrant with a continuous rotation of exhibitions and activities and became a great source of pleasure and relief in difficult times for the people of the city.



قبل الترميم  
Before restoration



بعد الترميم  
After restoration



بعد قصف المبنى  
After the bombardment of the building



After the bombardment of the building.

- 5) **Beit E-Tarzi (Tarzi home):** One of the most important houses built outside the borders of Old Gaza City and in the area known as New Gaza. It clearly expresses the building style during the British Mandate period. It was built in 1930. By Mr. Khader Antoun Rizq Tarazi, this house represents a new style related to the old style. The house was built using sandstone that was brought at that time from Beersheba, made of lime, and the floors of the house were colored, with each one tile measuring 20\*20 cm<sup>2</sup>. The first house was built towards west of Gaza, and later the Islamic Endowments Building was built nearby, also in the same style. At that time, Omar Al-Mukhtar Street was a sandy road through which people took animals to the sea.





Beit E-Tarzi Before October 2023



Beit E-Tarzi After October 2023

6) **Rashad Al-Shawa Cultural Center** was built in 1985, in a Rimal neighborhood located in the Northern area of Gaza. The place was named after its founder Rashad al-Shawa, the ex-mayor of the city, who had served for 11 years. The building was completed in 1988. Moreover, this center represents the memory of Gaza city.

The building was two-story tall with triangular roof. Rashad Al-Shawwa Cultural Center was considered as a very important viable center that included theater, central library and meeting hall where people gathered to celebrate social and national occasions. It hosted various local artistic, cultural and factional activities and events. It was also the most prominent cultural arena in the city. The central library was known as the public office building. It was the largest one within the Strip and contained historical documents and books.



The temporary truce in Gaza revealed the vast Israeli army's destruction of Rashad Shawa Cultural Center, which was an image of civilization and culture, before the occupation turned it into dust and rubble.

Taken on August 18, 2021 by Gaza Municipality



Taken after October 2023



The entrance of the Building before October 2023



The entrance of the Building after October 2023



Taken on 2017.

The library inside the center: Diana Tamari Sabbagh Library, after October 2023



**7) The Central Archives** contained thousands of historical documents dating for more than 150 years. Targeting the Central Archives poses a great danger to the city, as it contained thousands of historical and valuable documents for the community; these documents represented an integral part of the Palestinian history and culture. The Central Archives contained plans for ancient buildings of a historical value and documents made in handwriting of well-known national figures. These documents, dating back for a long time, were burned, turned them into ashes, erased a large part of the Palestinian memory.



After the October 2023



Inside the building, OCT. 2023

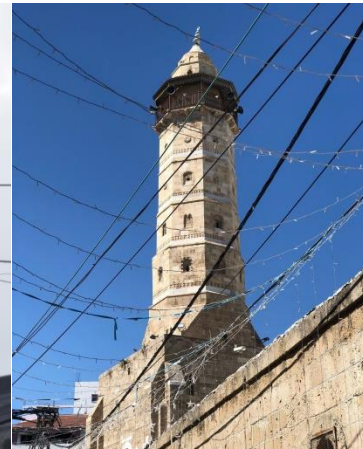
**8) Al-Omari Mosque- Gaza:** The largest and oldest mosque in the Gaza Strip is known as the Great Omari Mosque. Located within the enchanting Gaza's Old City, this architectural gem stands proudly in the Daraj Quarter, at the eastern end of Omar Mukhtar Street, where Al Qaysariyeh (the Gold Market) graces its southern facade. To the northeast, the Katib al-Wilaya Mosque adds to the spiritual tapestry of this ancient place.

This sacred site is believed to have ancient roots, standing on the consecrated grounds of an ancient Philistine temple. In the 5th century, the Byzantines erected a church on this very spot. With the arrival of the Muslims in the 7th century AD, the church was transformed into a mosque. In the 10th century, Ibn Batuta, the famous Arab geographer, described it as "the beautiful mosque".

The mosque bore the scars of British bombardment during World War I but was restored in 1925 under the Supreme Muslim Council. Again, in more recent times, the Mosque faced the ravages of Israeli airstrikes during the ruthless current round of escalation. Partial damage occurred to its mosque's minaret and solar energy cells, in clear targeting.



After October 2023



Before October 2023

**9) Al-Omari Mosque, Jabaliya**

Al-Omari Mosque located in Jabaliya was actually a building of two adjacent structures: a small historic mosque and a very large modern annex. The old part dated back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and consisted of an ancient minaret and three Riwaq supported by four stone columns. The arcades had pointed arches and the Riwaq was covered by crossing vaults. But Al-Omari was destroyed by the Israeli bombs in 2014 and restored and renovated again in 2017.





After October 2023



Taken on 2019.



Before October 2023



The Omari mosque- Jabaliya, after the Israeli bombed in **2014**.



The Poster shows the restoration in **2017** and then re-bombed in October **2023**.