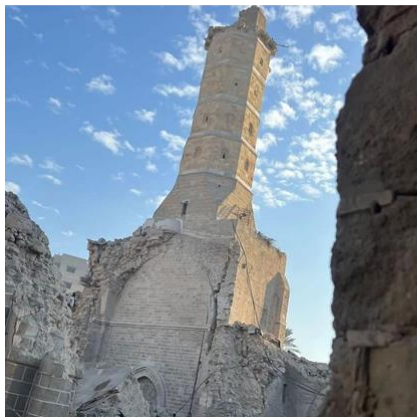
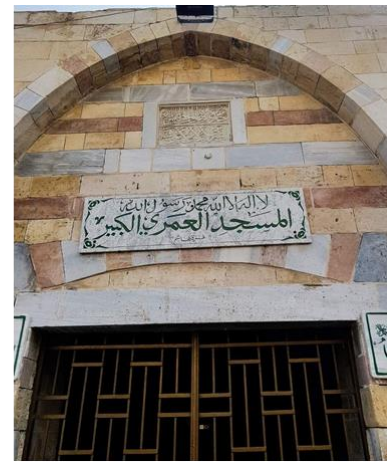


19 December 2023

Report #2: The Cultural Heritage Devastations in Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Documentation and evidence gathered: October 7th - December 16th 2023).

*This report is an update on the report published by ICOMOS Palestine on 30th November 2023



Prepared by: ICOMOS Palestine

- The barbaric aggression and destruction of Gaza persist. It is impossible to share a comprehensive update but we know for sure that the most significant historic mosque in Gaza, Al-Omari Mosque, has been bombed per pictures we received from our colleagues on grounds.

- More than 18,800 people were killed; 70% of whom were children and women, 288 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank and Jerusalem

Since 7 October 2023, the war on Gaza by Israeli occupation continues, including an ongoing genocide against indigence Palestinian people and violent bombardment and destruction of Gaza's urban fabric, infrastructure, and agricultural lands. These aggressions are being committed on Palestinian areas unlawfully occupied by Israel in 1967, while Gaza as an occupied land is still enduring a militant siege and blockade since 2007. In the light of this ongoing hardship, and with the temporary truce expired on 1st of December 2023, it is challenging to compile a comprehensive and detailed update on the level of destruction and aggression on the cultural heritage of Gaza. It is not possible to conduct a validated assessment of the damage done before having a permanent ceasefire in order to document the damages and protect the remaining of Gaza's ancient heritage. Also add that it is difficult to document first hand because of constant targeting of civilians by Israeli and absence of any safe zones what so ever. This report also documents Israeli occupation aggressions against cultural heritage in the rest of the occupied Palestinian areas in 1967; namely the West Bank including Jerusalem.

Here is an updated report including evidence that ICOMOS Palestine has been able to collect since the beginning of the genocidal war on Gaza. This report will be updated regularly

The report includes the following items:

- 1- Loss of human lives
- 2- Loss of Intangible heritage
- 3- Letters of incitement by Israeli officials
- 4- Loss of tangible/built heritage and sites and landscape
- 5- The situation in the West Bank and Jerusalem

1- Loss of human lives, up-to-date December 16th 2023: unjustified killing of scholars, artists and journalists. The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is worsening by the hour with most of its 2.3 million residents suffering from homelessness and being trapped in a tiny, embattled coastal enclave of 365 km² with no food, water, medical care, fuel, or safe shelter. The displacement of people from the North to the South and then from the South to the far South in Rafah.

- The number of Palestinians murdered continues to rise in a terrifying and tragic manner. More than 18,800 people have been killed; 70% of whom were children and women, and more than 51,000 people were injured, with large number missing according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health¹. A huge numbers of people are alive and trapped under the rubble and it has been reported that stray dogs have been eating decomposed bodies in the streets. Again, this kind of killing of civilians have been described as unprecedented in modern history of armed conflict by humanitarian organisations.

- There are no tools to rescue survivors from under collapsed buildings. Very primitive tools are used and rescue teams and family members are rescuing survivors with their bare hands. Many corpses are decomposing under rubbles which is an alarming threat of an imminent huge health catastrophe.

¹ https://site.moh.ps/Content/File/PWlhpjsrQ3d86U5U75iHVlvi_oXAcOM57b7CUGSucmhh9Yf6h.pdf

- Municipalities are out of service, waste is spread everywhere as there are no waste removal services and sanitation and sewage services were destroyed. The Gaza Strip is suffering from a health catastrophe in addition to the scourge of war. The level of sewage in homes has risen and seeped into groundwater. A toxic mixture of conditions for epidemic of diseases which are contributing to further deaths of people in Gaza.

- **Displacement:** According to UNRWA², as of December 12th, 2023, the number of residents forcibly displaced is estimated to 1.9 million people in Gaza, nearly 90% of its population who were displaced to the South in Khan Yunis and then to the far South in Rafah.² Most of Gaza's 2.3 million residents face homeless and the consequences of the ongoing siege and blockade which worsened since the 7th of October, with severe shortage of food, water, medical care, fuel, in addition to electricity blackout and lack of safe shelter tents and areas.

2. Intangible heritage losses: Artists 'communities and their contributions to Gaza's cultural heritage and cultural life and art legacies depicting Gaza's heritage have been destroyed. Handicraft workshops which formed sole livelihoods for many Gazans and many vital centers engaged in the preservation and the provision of sociocultural services have been erased to the ground. All these assets and intangible processes are critical to Gazans in sustaining their histories, heritages and cultural identities.

- **It is noteworthy that Bethlehem and Ramallah municipalities have announced recently that no Christmas festivities to be held in either city.** The extent of the grief and anxiety of people throughout Palestine has caused severe psychological trauma collectively leading to many Palestinians unable to even express their grief. Most social events and celebrations have been cancelled or postponed indefinitely including cultural rituals and traditions critical to family gatherings and the continuity of living traditions, weddings and other celebrations. Or they are held in tight confines under immense pressure and tensions which either compromises or weakens the cultural meaning and bonds they are meant to create for community cohesion and the transmission of intangible cultural heritage practices to future generations.

- The indiscriminate bombing of Gaza is targeted at all living form or life in Gaza. Children, women, the elderly, doctors, rescuers, journalists and humanitarian activists are just a few examples. **On 6 December 2023, Refaat Alareer Palestinian poet and writer were killed in an Israeli airstrike in northern Gaza, along with his brother, sister and her three children.**

-The landscape and its life have become barren full of rubble made up of destroyed homes and iconic cultural assets some of which hold universal value.

-Israel uses weapons and war strategies prohibited by the Geneva Convention and all other relevant conventions. When referring to the current genocide in Gaza, we must not only address the mass killings, we must take serious account of the disintegration of political, economic, social and

² (<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-50-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-Jerusalem>).

cultural systems and institutions critical for the functioning of Gaza and its people. Their loss is already beginning to show the eradication of life in Gaza.

-All of Gaza's history, heritage, memories and archives have been targeted. This was clearly reflected in the table of evidence as attached below and shared in our previous report: Israel is ethnically cleansing the Palestinian people and erasing their identity! Comments made by Israel's political leaders in many media interviews resonate this aim. Some are listed below.

3- Letters of incitement

Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 20 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: "Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law". Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (1965) also included references to hate speech.

Here are just a few examples of statements of incitement spread publicly by Israeli officials:

- 1) Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, on 9th October 2023 said publicly: "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed," Gallant says following an assessment at the IDF Southern Command in Beersheba. "We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly," he adds, see this link: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/09/israel-defense-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza-strip_6158600_4.html
- 2) Israel's Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi, on 14th December 2023 said publicly: "There will be no Palestinian state here. We will never allow another state to be established between the Jordan and the sea. We will never go back to Oslo, see tis link: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231214-israel-minister-there-will-be-no-return-to-oslo-no-palestinian-state/>
- 3) 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 7th denouncing this statement, see link: <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/israeli-minister-suggest-option-of-dropping-nuclear-bomb-to-gaza/>

These hate statements not only pose a grave threat to the lives of the people in Gaza but also risk causing irreparable harm to the cultural heritage of the region. It is imperative that Israel is responsible and must be held accountable for such statements and any action that they ensue. It is worth noting that it is speculated that the weight of the bombs already dropped on the Gaza Strip since October 7th, 2023 is twice that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, in comparison to the population size. The Israeli occupation forces (IOF) have been committing their crimes non-stop for 71 days and the extent of the damage cannot be accurately determined or described. Homes, schools, hospitals, religious buildings, universities, museums, farmland and all other facilities have been destroyed in addition to all acts of genocide.

4- Loss of tangible/built heritage and sites and landscape: intentional destruction of historic churches and the annihilation of many historical and archaeological mosques.

Deliberate destruction goes hand in hand with the deliberate targeting of universities, libraries, schools, hospitals, UN facilities, refugee camps, water facilities, streets and all other facilities.

New information from our colleagues of the recent destruction of cultural and natural heritage after the truce, which stopped on December 1, 2023, it will be added to the information of our first report.

- i. **The Great Omari Mosque**, the largest and oldest mosque in the Gaza Strip, has been hit by an Israeli airstrike; this mosque was attacked twice after October 2023.
- ii. **Major destruction to the old Gaza Municipality building** located on Omar Al-Mukhtar street, opposite to Al-Shujaiya quarter. The percentage of destruction is estimated to be around 50%.
- iii. **Israeli tanks intentionally destroyed Al-Pasha Palace outdoor garden**, the palace is known to be the official museum in Gaza City. Displaced Gazans were taking shelter there at the time of the attack.
- iv. **The ancient archaeological "Othman bin Qashqar " mosque in the old town of Gaza** City was bombed and completely destroyed. This mosque is located in Al- Shujaiya quarter and is known to be one of the oldest mosques and archaeological sites in the Gaza Strip.
- v. **Another historical mosque called "Ibn Othman"** is also located at the entrance of the Shujaiya quarter, close to the cemetery has also been attacked.
- vi. **The Holy Family Church of Gaza City is the only Catholic Church** in the Gaza Strip; this church was attacked by artillery fire in the outer quarter. More than 700 displaced Gazans were taking shelter in the church³. **Two Christian women were killed by IDF sniper fire inside the Holy Family Parish church on December 16th 2023.**
- vii. **Al-Sayyid Hashem mosque** located in the Northeastern part of Gaza city was destroyed by artillery fire. It is important to note that the last restoration of the mosque was carried out by the Al-Alami family in 2018.
- viii. **Another aggression against Al-Zawiya market (Souq Al- Zawiya)** led to its complete destruction. This is the second attack after the end of the truce, as mentioned in our previous report on November 30th, 2023.
- ix. **Al-Qaysaria market, known as the Gold market**, was built in the fourteenth century AD as an integral part of the southern Riwaq of the Great Al-Omari Mosque. It was the market was massively destroyed.

5- The situation in the West Bank and Jerusalem:

Based on initial reports from the Ministry of Palestinian health, **288 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank and Jerusalem since October 7th**. This year has been the bloodiest year for Palestinians since 2005 with 496 civilians killed since the beginning of the year.

IOF have attacked more than 3,450 Palestinians including at 535 children since October 7th. At least 84 Palestinians were injured due to the armed settlers' attacks in the West Bank. 331 incidents

³ <https://www.lpj.org/dioocese/gaza-parish.html>

have been reported since October 7th. IOF continue to target hospitals, health center and ambulances to limit access to basic health care services.

Since October 7th, the Israeli authorities have imposed severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank by using military checkpoints, concrete roadblocks and the deployment of large numbers of soldiers. This is despite the fact that there is has not been any published/reported evidence that the people of West Bank were involved since the events of October 7th. This goes to show that the Israeli actions are targeted at all Palestinians.

Random and unjustified arrests of Palestinians, depopulation, siege of known World Heritage sites in Jerusalem and Hebron and continued threats to cultural heritage sites nominated for the World Heritage list in Nablus are yet further evidence of the destruction of Palestinian heritage and identity.

Here are some of the attacks on Heritage sites in the West Bank including Jerusalem:

- i. **Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter, East Jerusalem:** Israeli settlers backed by security move to seize property from Armenian people.
- ii. **Hebron's Old City and the Ibrahimi Mosque** are continuously being attacked on the heritage sites, closures and restrictions are imposed on its population access by the Israeli forces, in addition to attacks by the Israeli settlers.
- iii. **Refugee Camps in Jenin and Ein Shams camp in Tulkarem** have got their infrastructure intentionally destroyed by Israeli tanks. Moreover, repeated invasions of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank are carried out by the Israeli occupying forces.
- iv. **Israel to seize Palestinian-owned archaeological land in Salfit:** December 11, 2023 IOF notified several Palestinian families of their intentions to take over their lands in the archaeological area of Deir Qala, East of the town of Deir Ballut in Salfit. Deir Qala is located 2 km east of Deir Ballut, where the monastery of Ballut was built more than 1,500 years ago. Deir Ballut is around 18 dunums threatened with imminent seizure by the occupation.
- v. **Sebastia:** IOF invaded archaeological area in Sebastia village, Northwest of Nablus. They have setup camp in the Columns Street surrounding the archaeological site, accompanied by a bulldozer belonging to armed Israeli settlers.
 - Local people in Sabastiya fear a colonial plan being implemented in the region to build Israeli archaeological Biblical park on it.
 - It is worth noting that Sebastia is a registered heritage site on the Palestinian Tentative list, the occupation government allocated a huge budget to its several months ago to implement their colonial plan.

In additions, attacks on Area C land 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 some of the occupation's daily barbaric and fascist practices against the Palestinian people, before and after October 7th.