

Signature of an Innovative Project to **Support Youth and Socio-Economic Development in the Gaza Strip around Palestinian Cultural Heritage.**

PRESS RELEASE

29 March 2022

*Palestinian Prime Minister, H.E. Mohammad Shtayyeh, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), H.E. Ms. Rula Ma'ayah signed today with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), H. E the French Consul General M. René Troccaz and Première Urgence Internationale an agreement to launch a **5-year project to Support Youth and Socio-Economic Development in the Monastery of Saint Hilarion in the Gaza Strip, as part of the INTIQAL 2030 program.***



The baths complex at the Saint Hilarion Monastery - © Première Urgence Internationale

Located on the coast in the municipality of Nuseirat, in the center of the Gaza Strip, the Monastery of Saint Hilarion – Tell um el-Amr – is **the oldest and largest monastery in Palestine**. Discovered in the 1997, it has been the subject of several archaeological clearance and reconnaissance campaigns, conducted under the direction of the EBAF (French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem). Included in 2011 on the list of Monuments in Danger by the World Monuments Funds, then on the indicative list of UNESCO, its heritage value has been gradually recognized internationally.

Programs to safeguard the archaeological site have intensified in recent years. An agreement with the British Council Cultural and Protection Fund has enabled the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale to carry out from 2017 to 2022 a major operation to preserve and protect the remains of the Saint Hilarion site, including training actions for young Gazan students and actions to enhance the cultural value of the site. The Monastery of Saint Hilarion is the only archaeological site open to the public in the Gaza Strip, and has welcomed in recent years more than 10,000 visitors per year.

The project overall objective is to **establish St Hilarion site as a venue for social & economic development for youth in the Gaza Strip, through:**

- ➔ The **setup of ambitious infrastructures and site enhancement** to ensure protection of the site, based on the recommendation of the MoTA-led Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) with UNESCO; and the construction of a protective cover above the archeological remains.
- ➔ The creation of an **interpretation centre**, for the reception of the public and specifically youth as well as the development of cultural activities, scientific mediation, exhibitions for the benefit of the population of Gaza Strip, allowing the valorization of the site among youth and the local communities with a view to boost the local economic fabric and social cohesion and support the resilience and well-being of young people.
- ➔ The Development of an ambitious and comprehensive **training programme** targeting youth and MoTA staff in the field of heritage preservation, restoration and valorization, cultural mediation, site management and technical maintenance, scientific and cultural programming.
- ➔ **Outreach activities** aiming at promoting the site of St Hilarion in East-Jerusalem and in the West Bank through the establishment of exhibitions and innovative tools.
- ➔ The **Co-construction of by-laws and coordination mechanisms with MoTA** and based on CMP recommendations to establish local communities' committees, strategic board, scientific committee to develop a stable governance framework to ensure sustainable management of the site in a perspective of long-term strategic development.

INTIQAL 2030 is a Youth-led initiative supported by **Première Urgence Internationale**, an innovative socio-economic development program that leverages on the protection of Cultural Heritage involving communities and local civil society stakeholders, encouraging their interaction on archaeological sites. This initiative creates and runs a safe space in which girls, boys, young people and families engage in concrete actions and express their fears and hopes in a protective environment while developing their resilience following violent or traumatic experiences.

Beyond its cultural and historical positive impact, renovating archaeological sites and engaging Palestinians in learning about their cultural heritage, the INTIQAL 2030 program champions other socio-economic development objectives. These include innovative activities aiming at achieving economic and energy independence of the site and its activities, and bringing new sustainable solutions which will benefit and empower Gazans and their community in the long term. Since the start of INTIQAL 2030 program, 94 new graduate, young women and men, 10 technicians and 300 volunteers have benefited from its various trainings in archaeology and conservation of cultural heritage.

This project will set in motion a virtuous circle by linking the themes of heritage preservation, long-term economic development, cultural and social development, allowing multiple benefits in terms of sustainable development, strengthening the resilience of local populations and the promotion of Palestinian cultural heritage at local and international levels.

Through strengthening and reframing youth's relationships with cultural heritage, future societal outcomes are reimagined, more vibrant than ever, reflecting the resilience youth in the occupied Palestinian territory are well known for.

Hence, INTIQAL 2030 provides opportunities for Youth to be a positive force for development, engaging them in supporting and achieving comprehensive socio-economic development for their community, and to help accelerate the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

INTIQAL 2030 is part of **Première Urgence Internationale's** efforts to advocate for culture in sustainable development. The programme contributes to the monitoring, collection, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in the field of culture, increasing culture's visibility for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – ensuring that no one is left behind.



AFD representatives visit at the St Hilarion site - © Première Urgence Internationale

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Première Urgence Internationale (PUI) is a non-profit, non-political, non-religious international NGO. Our mission is to defend basic human rights, such as those set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Operational in the Occupied Palestinian territory since 2002, PUI has developed integrated programmes to assist Palestinians affected by, or threatened with, protection risks. We help communities prepare for, and respond to, emergencies, we provide emergency response, including in-kind and cash-based interventions.

We contribute to the humanitarian coordination mechanisms to promote human rights and advocate for the rights of Palestinians locally and internationally.