

Byblos conference: Protecting Cultural Heritage Sites

Under the Patronage of the President of Lebanon

October 19, 2012

I. Context:

Lebanon is subject to a wide range of natural hazards, the biggest threat being of a severe earthquake and/or an associated Tsunami. Smaller-scale disasters which the country also faces include floods, forest fires, land-slides and drought. Recent assessments also show that the vulnerability of the Lebanese population to both large and small-scale disasters is compounded by the following factors:

- a) Limited presence of the government ministries in peripheral regions;
- b) Haphazard housing and unchecked urban expansion;
- c) Lack of enforcement of building codes;
- d) Lack of regulation of land use; and
- e) A range of environmental factors.

The city of Byblos, a coastal city of the governorate of Mount Lebanon located 40 km North of Beirut, is particularly threatened by earthquakes and tsunamis. Being one of the oldest Phoenician cities, the ruins of many successive civilizations are found at Byblos, thus classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

In the context of the UNDP and Lebanese Government project “Strengthening Disaster Risk Management Capacities in Lebanon”, and within the support provided by UNDP to 252 municipalities in Lebanon to participate in the UNISDR World Disaster Reduction Campaign, Byblos was one of the first cities in Lebanon to join. This entailed that the city would initiate activities around the Ten campaign Essentials in order to make the city more resilient:

- Essential 1: Institutional and Administrative Framework
- Essential 2: Financing and Resources
- Essential 3: Multi-hazard Risk Assessment- Know your Risk
- Essential 4: Infrastructure Protection, Upgrading and Resilience
- Essential 5: Protect Vital Facilities: Education and Health
- Essential 6: Building Regulations and Land Use Planning
- Essential 7: Training, Education and Public Awareness
- Essential 8: Environmental Protection and Strengthening of Ecosystems
- Essential 9: Effective Preparedness, Early Warning and Response
- Essential 10: Recovery and Rebuilding Communities

To this end, the DRM unit supported Byblos municipality to attend the Global Platform in Geneva in May 2011. In consequence, the Municipality of Byblos has started

coordination with the municipality of Venice as they shared similarities in the challenges they faced in DRR.

Consequently, on 28 June 2011, the municipality of Byblos organized a two-day workshop that was attended by the focal point of the municipality of Venice Mr Pierpaolo Campostrini, and the C.E.O of Milan Engineering Company Mr Maurizio Milan, in addition to Italian engineers as well as Lebanese stakeholders. During the workshop best practices and concrete measures for reducing natural disasters' risk in Byblos based on Venice's success story were discussed. Several concrete measures were discussed during the second day of the workshop on what Byblos can do to protect its heritage from maritime disasters, suggestions came from both parties, the Lebanese and Italian, and revolved around the following: (i) adding an extension to the existing wave breaker in Byblos, (ii) preserving the harbor of Byblos as a traditional fishermen port rather than an industrial port, (iii) initiating more coordination between the different ministries including Environment, Culture and Transportation, and (iv) creating aeration systems in the existing harbor.

Moreover, the municipality of Byblos participated in the workshop on the role of Local Governments in Reducing Risk & Preventing Disasters, organized by the DRM Unit. This two-day workshop aimed at bringing together the group of local government officials that committed or expressed interest in committing to the "Making Cities Resilient Campaign", to enhance their knowledge and capacities with respect to disaster risk reduction and its integration in city planning and local development. The workshop offered an opportunity for shared-learning and exchanges on good practices, challenges and opportunities to advance risk reduction locally in Lebanon. It also offered the participants perspectives and experiences from other countries to encourage city-to-city learning on reducing urban risk.

Finally, Byblos municipality has also been supported by UNISDR to attend the international conference on "Cities Building Resilience to Disasters: Protecting Cultural Heritage and Adapting to Climate Change", organized by the Municipality of Venice, in collaboration with Corila (Research Consortium Lagoon) and UNISDR in March 2012. This allowed the municipality to further the discussions with the municipality of Verona, in view of initiating a twinning between the two cities.

II. Aim and Objectives of the conference

The conference will aim to promote a common understanding of the risks which World Heritage Sites currently face, and to discuss practical strategies to strengthen resilience and to reduce vulnerabilities.

Under the patronage of the President of the Lebanese Republic, and in collaboration with UNDP and UNISDR, the municipality of Byblos will invite national and regional stakeholders to a half-day conference, with particular objectives to:

- a) Provide an overview of the main key natural risks that face heritage sites such as Byblos as well as other cities in Lebanon and the Region;
- b) Share experiences from other countries faced with similar challenges;
- c) Highlight the recommendations of the Byblos-Venice collaboration;
- d) Explore practical strategies to strengthen resilience and to reduce vulnerabilities;
- e) Initiate a national Platform for the Protection of Heritage Sites.