



Heritage *for* Peace • Hotel d'Entitats, Rutlla, 20-22 • 17002 Girona • Catalonia (SP)

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Damage Assessment Training for Staff of the Syrian Interim Ministry of Culture and Family Affairs

"FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" 1st December, 2014

Girona, Spain – Heritage *for* Peace, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Family Affairs of the Syrian Interim Government held a 'Damage Assessment for Cultural Heritage' training in Gaziantep, Turkey from 23 – 26 November. The training, which included heritage experts on the Ministry staff, was the final element of a support program for the Interim Government's Task Force on Antiquities and Museums funded by the Dutch Government

The trainers of Heritage *for* Peace started with a short introduction on Risk Management. Damage assessment principles were introduced, with participants learning methods for systematic collection of data through a standardized form on an individual basis and later in subgroups. Free GPS applications for smartphones were introduced and explained. In the post-training evaluation, one of the participant noted that "Before I did not really know what to write down on the damage of an archaeological mound but now I do and I can even see the details of the damage." Equipment was provided to facilitate damage assessment work within Syria. Purchases were based on needs identified by participants, including laptops, digital cameras, and motorcycles. The training was extended at the request of participants; the last day was spent on prioritization of needs and short introductions in some basic skills as management, computer use, accounting and administration.

This training was intended for staff on the payroll of the interim Ministry of Culture and Family Affairs working inside Syria. As a train-the-trainer exercise, participants will pass on their acquired knowledge and practice to their colleagues in the region where they are working. This proven methodology can create a 'snowball effect' that dramatically promotes capacity-building.

Proper damage assessment for archaeological sites and heritage buildings is important for several reasons. Systematic, uniform and objective collection of data on damage is of the utmost importance and will enhance the reliability of the data. Only a reliable overview of the damage to Syrian heritage is a proper tool for awareness raising on the immense destruction of Syrian heritage at all levels: local, national and international. Reliable data can also be used as evidence if prosecutions are brought before national or international courts for destruction of Syria's cultural heritage.

Heritage *for* Peace consists of volunteers who are leading Syrian and international experts comprising of academics, scholars, heritage professionals and independent advisors. For more information on Heritage *for* Peace and our activities, visit us online at: <http://www.heritageforpeace.org/>.

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