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PART I

UNESCO'S RESPONSE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

SUMMARY

The Director-General wishes to inform the Executive Board of UNESCO's response to the Syria crisis, as the conflict in Syria has entered its fourth year. The present document provides summary information on the coordination of UNESCO's global response to the Syria crisis, describing advocacy efforts deployed, as well as humanitarian and longer-term assistance provided in response to needs within the Organization's fields of competence.

I. Introduction

1. The conflict in Syria entered into its fourth year in March 2014 and has generated the world's largest humanitarian crisis in recent decades with unspeakable human suffering and loss. More than 9 million Syrians have been uprooted from their homes, including 2.5 million who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan, but also in Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

2. The crisis has created pressing needs in UNESCO's fields of competence both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries hosting large, and continuously increasing, numbers of Syrian refugees. As a result of the important influx of refugees and given that the vast majority of the refugees are now living outside of camps, the public service systems of hosting countries have been put under severe strain and their capacity to cope with needs of the refugee and local populations seriously challenged.

3. In the field of education, an estimated 3 million Syrian children and young people have dropped out of school, putting at risk the future of a whole generation of young Syrians. Beyond the continuously growing needs in terms of access to education, challenges are also multiple in meeting minimum standards of quality education: classrooms are overcrowded; teachers as well as textbooks are lacking; and existing teachers may not be prepared to address the special needs of affected children and youth, notably in terms of psycho-social support, as well as – for most refugees – adaptation to a new curriculum.

4. As regards culture, the conflict in Syria has led to considerable and sometimes irreversible damage at cultural heritage sites, including at the six World Heritage properties in the country. The systematic looting of archaeological sites, illicit traffic and illegal export of cultural objects have reached unprecedented levels. In some cases, damage and destruction at cultural heritage sites resulted directly from their use for military purposes. Finally, an alarming new trend has been the deliberate targeting and destruction, for ideological reasons, of pre-Islamic cultural heritage with human representations.

5. Also, freedom of expression, access to information as well as journalist safety have been severely affected. Since the inception of the conflict, 51 journalists were killed in Syria. The killings of media professionals have been systematically condemned by the Director-General in statements made between 20 November 2011 and 19 March 2014.

6. The international community, refugee-hosting governments and communities have provided significant support to address the humanitarian tragedy of the Syria crisis. At the recent Kuwait II Donor Conference on the Syria crisis (Kuwait City, Kuwait, 15 January 2014), international donors pledged an additional US \$2.3 billion to meet humanitarian needs. Nevertheless, as stated by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-Moon "humanitarian aid can save lives – but it cannot resolve this crisis". Consequently, the Secretary-General has repeatedly called for a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

II. UNESCO's response to the Syria crisis

7. Since the onset of the crisis, UNESCO has been addressing the most pressing humanitarian needs, with a particular focus on education, throughout the subregion. As the crisis has expanded and become protracted, UNESCO has adopted a broader and longer-term approach seeking to link humanitarian and developmental efforts, supporting the coping capacity of hosting countries and communities, and thus offering more durable solutions to needs within its fields of competence.

8. UNESCO action is fully coordinated with broader efforts of the international community, in particular of the United Nations system. It is integrated into relevant United Nations common response frameworks, in particular the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP)

and the Regional Response Plan 6 (RRP 6), launched at the Kuwait II Donor Conference. It is also closely aligned with longer-term national response plans, such as the Stabilisation Roadmap of Lebanon, and the National Resilience Plan of Jordan.

9. On 15 January 2014, the Director-General participated in the Kuwait II Donor Conference on Syria (Kuwait City, Kuwait). On this occasion, the Director-General advocated in particular for further investment in education for young people affected by the crisis, as a priority both for the development and stability in the subregion. Her appeal echoed and supported the emphasis put on a strengthened response in education as presented in the “No Lost Generation Initiative”.

10. On the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the Director-General visited Jordan; a visit fully dedicated to the Organization’s response to the crisis. During the audience with Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah II, as well as meetings with Their Excellencies Mr Ibrahim Seif, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation; Mr Nasser Judeh, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mr Mohammad Thneibat, Minister of Education, meetings with United Nations partners and donors, the Director-General reiterated UNESCO’s commitment to further expand its response to the Syria crisis, in support, notably, of governmental efforts in Jordan and in other major refugee-hosting countries.

II.1 Meeting the educational needs of affected populations

11. As a result of large population displacements inside Syria and to neighbouring countries, of the prevailing insecurity inside Syria and of the alleged or reported use of schools for military purposes, a considerable number of children and youth been dropping out of school since the beginning of the crisis. In this context, UNESCO has been working with refugee hosting governments and communities to support enrolment and provide alternative opportunities to access quality education for both children and youth.

12. The large number of unoccupied youth has become a matter of increasing concern to UNESCO. It appears not only as an educational and developmental issue, but also one of stability for the subregion and beyond. Indeed, as unprecedented levels of sectarian extremism and violence unfold, failure to provide access to quality education contributes to manipulation and exploitation of young people. Therefore, following the Kuwait II Donor Conference, UNESCO developed and launched a Youth Education for Stability (YES) Programme, focusing on education, empowerment and engagement of young people affected by the Syria crisis.

13. The YES Programme is subregional in nature, but contextualized at the national level, targeting Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. It is thereby firmly anchored in existing common response frameworks (cf. para. 8 above) and aid coordination structures that exist in the four participating countries. It also supports the underpinning objectives of the No Lost Generation Initiative. The Programme, which builds on existing achievements in support of the Syria refugee response, as described below, was submitted to a number of interested donors.

14. **In Lebanon**, UNESCO focused its support on enhancing the response capacity of the Ministry of Education, and key educational partners, in emergency educational planning and management. During November and December 2013, 100 school principals from the four provinces most affected by the refugee influx received training in minimum standards of quality education in emergencies, based on the INEE (International network of Education in Emergencies) standards. UNESCO also contributed to joint needs assessment and targeted mapping exercises of the Education Working Group in Lebanon.

15. In order to enhance regional harmonized approaches and coordination among partners, UNESCO co-organized with UNHCR a conference on “Exploring a Regional Education Response to the Syria Refugee crisis” in Beirut, in December 2013. The Conference provided a platform for informed, in-depth discussions among international and national partners, both governmental and non-governmental, on the challenges faced by refugees and host communities in education, and

on response priorities. Previously, in November 2013, a subregional workshop on “Youth participation in promoting social cohesion and peace-building in the Mashrek subregion” was held in Beirut. The workshop aimed at sharing ongoing efforts and good practices on youth inclusion and social cohesion in particular in the context of the Syria crisis.

16. **In Jordan**, UNESCO actively engaged in the education sector both through the humanitarian coordination mechanism and in the resilience-based aid architecture, namely the “Host Community Support Platform”.

17. UNESCO has been supporting the Ministry of Education of Jordan in mitigating the adverse impact of the Syria crisis on the quality of education by enhancing its capacity in crisis planning and management. For instance, through the EU-funded project “Sustaining Quality Education and Promoting Skills Development Opportunities for Young Syrian refugees in Syria” launched in 2013, technical assistance is being provided in implementing rapid surveys via the use of mobile phone technology to collect basic data, on a voluntary basis, from Syrian refugee youth in Jordan on their educational needs. Through the recently approved project entitled “Technical Assistance to enhance accessibility and use of the Jordanian MoE Education Management Information System (EMIS) for evidence-based policy formulation”, also funded by the EU, the Ministry of Education will be provided with larger-scale institutional, technical and human capacities in data collection and their subsequent use in policy formulation.

18. In partnership with the Queen Rania Teacher Academy (QRTA), particular emphasis was put on teacher training to cope with trauma-affected students and the management of large classes in emergency situations. With an initial financial contribution from Bulgarian Funds-in-Trust, and subsequent longer-term funding under the “Sustaining Education and Promoting Skills Development Opportunities for Young Syrian refugees in Syria” project, teacher-training material has been developed, 439 Ministry of Education teacher trainers, as well as 1,955 Jordanian teachers, trained in classroom-based pedagogical support. Importantly, the teaching material developed was recently adopted by a USAID-funded project implemented by QRTA to substantively expand the number of Jordanian teachers benefitting from such training.

19. The EU-funded project “Sustaining Quality Education and Promoting Skills Development Opportunities for Young Syrian refugees in Syria” also includes the provision of demand-driven skills development through informal education, non-formal education youth mentoring to promote their resilience and referrals for voluntary reinsertion into the formal education system or other forms of training opportunities. Activities in these areas already benefitted 1,300 young people.

20. **In Iraq**, UNESCO has been focusing on provision of access to formal and non-formal quality education opportunities particularly for youth and young adults. With funding from the Emergency Relief Fund (OCHA), three secondary schools have been established in Domiz, DaraShakran and Kawargosk camps, providing immediate access to education to 3,500 students. UNESCO also provided school stationary and catch-up classes to 800 students in support of a smooth reintegration back to the formal school system. One hundred teachers were trained on psychosocial support, orientation on the Iraqi secondary curriculum, pedagogy and classroom management. Finally, 100 parents received training on school support and management.

21. In the field of non-formal education, UNESCO launched an Education and Life Skills Training Support Programme for young adults. Funded by the Central Emergency Response Fund (OCHA), the project aims at empowering 1,700 beneficiaries with literacy and essential life skills (including counselling and non-formal vocational training for livelihood) delivered in 14 Community Learning Centres.

II.2 Safeguarding Syria’s cultural heritage

22. All layers of the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Syria have been affected by the conflict, with considerable damage and destruction, thereby undermining the core foundations of the multi-

ethnic and multi-confessional cultural identity of the country. In June 2013, at its 37th session in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), the World Heritage Committee inscribed the six World Heritage sites in Syria on the List of World Heritage in Danger to alert the international community and mobilize support.

23. The Director-General has been leading international awareness-raising and advocacy efforts for the safeguarding of Syria's cultural heritage. Since 2012, more than 10 public statements have been issued,¹ systematically condemning the destruction of monuments and sites of major significance and calling upon the Parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under the 1954 Hague Convention and customary international humanitarian law. Also, in September 2013, the Director-General joined the launch in New York of the ICOM Emergency Red List of Syrian Cultural Objects at Risk. Most recently, on 12 March 2014, the Director-General, the United Nations Secretary-General and the United Nations-Arab League Joint Special Representative issued a joint statement, calling on all parties to halt all destruction of Syrian heritage, condemning the use of cultural sites for military purposes and alerting on the high risks of illicit trafficking. The joint statement also referred to Security Council resolution 2139 of 22 February 2014, which "calls on all the parties to [...] save Syria's rich societal mosaic and cultural heritage, and take appropriate steps to ensure the protection of Syria's World Heritage Sites".

24. In response to the significant rise in looting and illicit trafficking of cultural objects from Syria, and thanks to funding from Switzerland, UNESCO organized a subregional workshop in Amman (Jordan) in February 2013, with key partners including the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria, local and international police and customs authorities, INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, ICA, ICCROM, ICOM, ICOMOS, IFLA, main international archaeological, as well as representatives from the art market. The workshop served to identify effective measures to mitigate the risks and consequences of illicit trafficking of Syrian cultural property and draw up an action plan for the safeguarding of Syria's cultural heritage. Subsequently, in August 2013, the Director-General convened a High-Level Meeting of Experts on the Safeguarding of Syria's Cultural Heritage, where the action plan was further refined and endorsed in the presence of Mr Lakhdar Brahimi, the Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria.

25. UNESCO has started implementing the action plan through a EU-funded project on "Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian cultural heritage" signed in December 2013. The project includes awareness-raising and monitoring activities through an online International Observatory of Syrian Cultural Heritage, damage and needs assessments, technical assistance and capacity-building in emergency safeguarding, documentation and inventories, for both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

II.3 Enhancing freedom of expression and providing life-saving information

26. Through its two regional programmes for the MENA region in the field of freedom of expression, funded respectively by Sweden and Finland, UNESCO has been promoting access to essential information to youth affected by the Syria crisis and supported communication platforms for dialogue across communities both in Jordan and in Lebanon.

27. Youth information centres are being established at secondary schools both in Jordan and Lebanon. The centres will provide Syrian refugee and host community youth with a place to acquire skills through non-formal education, access vital information and interact across communities. Each centre is being equipped with computer labs and a library.

28. UNESCO has been assisting existing community radios to reach out to youth affected by the crisis both in Jordan and in Lebanon and provide them new opportunities to get their voices heard. In partnership with Radio Voice of Lebanon, and Yarmouk FM and Farah al Nas radio stations in

¹ Statements and press releases dated 30 March, 30 July and 1 October 2012; 25 April, 26 April, 2 June, 16 July and 29 August 2013; and 20 February and 12 March 2014.

Jordan, young journalists have been trained on reporting on issues of special interest and concern to youth. In Jordan, since November 2013, a biweekly programme “Sa’a Suriya” (The Syrian Hour) is aired on Yarmouk FM and more recently on Farah el Nas radio in Amman. Thanks to financial support from Japan, UNESCO will be able to continue supporting these communication platforms throughout 2014.

III. Conclusion

29. Building on its achievements, UNESCO is scaling up its response with parallel and complementary focus on humanitarian and longer-term development needs of the people affected by the Syria crisis. To that effect, and thanks to extrabudgetary resources provided by its Member States, the Organization is strengthening its operations on the ground through concerned field offices. For instance, as Cluster Office for Syria and Lebanon, the Regional Bureau of Beirut has been reinforced with the appointment of a new temporary Culture Programme Specialist position specifically dedicated to the Syria crisis response.

30. Programmatic coherence and visibility are equally important in view of UNESCO’s growing role in the Syria crisis response. To enhance internal coordination, a special task force on the Syria crisis has been established under the Director-General’s chairmanship. The Organization’s action will also remain closely coordinated with main partners, and aligned with global United Nations response frameworks and mechanisms, as well as major international efforts in its fields of competence, such as the No Lost Generation Initiative. In this connection, the Director-General will participate in the high-level meeting on the No Lost Generation Initiative taking place in Washington, D.C. on 11 April 2014. In order to ensure high visibility of UNESCO’s response, a dedicated website² has been set up, providing updated information on related UNESCO activities implemented in each country affected by the crisis as well as on global advocacy efforts. The website will also host the Syria crisis response online donations campaign.

² www.unesco.org/syria-crisis-response.