

WG 02 - SBH AT RISK - PREPAREDNESS - RESPONSE - RECOVERY - HIA

- **SBH AT RISK- PREPAREDNESS AND HIA**

In the context of anticipating and mitigating the risks that could jeopardise our collective built heritage, the **Heritage Impact Assessment [HIA]** emerges as a pivotal instrument. It facilitates the establishment of a more comprehensive and global framework, encompassing the existing situation, the potential threats, and the requisite actions.

The HIA methodically analyses the necessary measures, implements them where applicable, and ensures ongoing monitoring.

The Asia Pacific Regional Network group, of which our Vice President Soehardi Hartono is a member, has organised a series of webinars on the subject of the Heritage Impact Assessment, which we invite you to listen to and comment on, as they give a clearer idea of what is happening in the Asia Pacific Region.

You can still view previous Webinar of HIA Series by visiting YouTube channel as follows:

1st Webinar of HIA – Southeast Asia Series

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUEb5erGF2I&t=44s>

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqoXyuHLjiM&t=3s>

2nd Webinar of HIA – East Asia Series

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdKWWxi2u0>

3rd Webinar of HIA – Australia, New Zealand and Pasifica Series

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_CX4WA1sFw

4th Webinar of HIA – South Asia Series

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GYsVXF8MME&t=5s>



Screen picture - webinar series

- **SBH AT RISK - SAFEGUARDING THE PAST AMID WAR**

The very concept of shared built heritage, endangered and threatened, is also an important issue that deserves our attention, please read our new member Akram Lislá's article based on his experience working in Gaza.

Safeguarding the Past Amid War: Emergency Efforts to Preserve Gaza's Cultural Heritage.



Picture by the author, Gaza 2025.

In the introduction we can read:

Palestine is a cradle of civilization, home to a rich cultural heritage shaped by millennia of human history. For Palestinians, this heritage is not merely historical—it is a cornerstone of identity and collective memory. However, the relentless Israeli occupation and repeated cycles of violence have placed these irreplaceable cultural assets at serious risk. While global attention has focused on preserving heritage in the West Bank since Palestine's recognition by UNESCO, Gaza's sites remain particularly endangered, especially following the devastating war that began on October 7, 2023. (Lilja, 2025)

Safeguarding the Past Amid War: Emergency Efforts to Preserve Gaza's Cultural Heritage

By: Akram Lilja, PhD

ICOMOS-ICORP and ISCSBH expert

Introduction

Palestine is a cradle of civilization, home to a rich cultural heritage shaped by millennia of human history. For Palestinians, this heritage is not merely historical—it is a cornerstone of identity and collective memory. However, the relentless Israeli occupation and repeated cycles of violence have placed these irreplaceable cultural assets at serious risk. While global attention has focused on preserving heritage in the West Bank since Palestine's recognition by UNESCO, Gaza's sites remain particularly endangered, especially following the devastating war that began on October 7, 2023.

Amidst this humanitarian and cultural crisis, the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP) has emerged as a leading force in protecting Gaza's endangered heritage. Through damage assessments, emergency response projects, capacity-building, and international advocacy, CCHP is working to ensure that Gaza's history survives even under fire.

Acting Despite Conflict – Preserving Heritage Under Fire

The war that erupted in October 2023 inflicted massive destruction on Gaza's built environment, including cultural heritage. Hospitals, universities, shelters, and religious sites were reduced to rubble. Gaza's cultural scene—museums, historic mosques, archaeological sites—suffered deliberate and collateral damage, endangering centuries of human history.

Despite these conditions, CCHP remained operational. One of its most significant efforts was the development of a management plan for the Saint Hilarion Monastery—a critical step toward listing the site as Gaza's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. Although the team was fragmented between Gaza, the West Bank, and Europe and faced immense communication and travel hurdles, the plan was completed and submitted in March 2024, illustrating CCHP's commitment to heritage preservation, even in wartime.

Evidence and Urgency – Assessing Damage in Real Time

Recognizing the prolonged nature of the conflict, CCHP launched an emergency project in March 2024 to assess damage to heritage sites, in collaboration with the University of Oxford's EMENA project and funded by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund.

The findings were sobering:

- 316 heritage sites were identified in Gaza.
- 152 (48%) sustained direct damage.

- 74 (23%) could not be accessed due to security risks.
- Only 90 (29%) remained confirmed as undamaged.

These assessments, carried out under constant threat, also served a dual purpose: immediate preservation and documentation for future accountability and restoration.



Picture by the author, Gaza 2025.

National Coordination – Local Leadership in Crisis

To respond more effectively, CCHP led the formation of the National Committee for Damage Assessment and Preservation of Gaza's Heritage Sector, consisting of 20 heritage professionals, including 13 based inside Gaza. Despite ongoing bombardments, the committee has met regularly—every two to three weeks—to coordinate emergency response, propose protective measures, and develop long-term recovery plans.

This effort highlights a core principle: empowering local experts to lead heritage rescue missions, even when international access is limited.

Building Capacity – Training Amid Destruction

Realizing the urgent need for trained professionals on the ground, CCHP organized several workshops and training courses during the conflict. These ranged from basic damage assessment techniques to handling unexploded ordnance, delivered in partnership with institutions such as Oxford University, ALIPH, UNMAS, and the British Council.

Key trainings included:

- Damage Assessment and Documentation (May 2024)
- Architectural Heritage Assessment (May 18–22, 2024)
- Handling Unexploded Ordnance (May 29, 2024)
- Emergency Building Conservation (February 1–8, 2025)
- On-site Structural Stabilization (Cairo, February 21–26, 2025)

Each of these capacity-building efforts contributed to a growing corps of local experts capable of responding to the cultural emergency.

Immediate Intervention – Protect First, Restore Later

Despite ongoing war conditions, CCHP moved quickly to begin emergency stabilization at key heritage sites, leveraging international funding and remote coordination with teams on the ground. More than ten sites have received first-aid interventions.

Examples include:

- **Khan of Amir Younis Al-Nayrouzi Castle:** Over 100 tons of rubble cleared; structure reinforced.
- **Qaysariyyeh Bazaar, Gaza City:** 240 tons of rubble removed; roofing and cracks repaired.
- **Al-Omari Mosque:** Rubble sorted; arches reinforced; further work funded by ALIPH.
- **Qasr al-Pasha:** Bombed 13th-century palace stabilized with stone collection for future restoration.
- **Ibn Marwan Mosque and Others:** Projects approved or underway, targeting debris management and consolidation.

These projects not only preserve heritage but also provide vital income and psychological stability to local communities amidst war.

Advocacy and Inclusion – Making Heritage a Global Concern

CCHP engaged global institutions such as ALIPH, CER, UNESCO, CPF, the British Council, and Gerda Henkel Foundation to secure support and bring international attention to Gaza's heritage crisis. It hosted workshops and dialogues to build awareness and shape policy:

- A virtual workshop in January 2024 launched a team focused on protection and reconstruction.
- An archaeological documentation session in August 2024 included 50 participants from Gaza.
- A national workshop in November 2025, under the patronage of the Palestinian Minister of Tourism, addressed long-term strategies for reconstruction and preservation.

These events ensured that Gaza's heritage remained visible in global cultural discourse.



Picture by the author, Gaza 2025.

Human Stories: Risk, Loss, and Devotion

Behind these efforts are personal stories of courage and sacrifice. Mahmed Al Fara of CCHP recounted a harrowing experience inspecting a site under drone surveillance. “We see it as a duty to our Holy Land,” he said. “Each site is like one of our children.”

Hamoudeh Al-Duhdar, a heritage expert, led emergency work at Al-Qissariya Bazaar after his daughter and six relatives were killed in a missile strike. Despite unimaginable personal loss, he continues to lead restoration efforts at Pasha Palace. Similarly, Hazem Four, injured in a bombing while he was in his way to the work at Qaysariyyeh Bazaar, exemplifies the extreme personal risk faced by heritage workers in Gaza.



Picture by the author, Gaza 2025.



Picture by the author, Gaza 2025.

Conclusion: “Heritage Cannot Wait”

The work of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Gaza underscores a fundamental truth: cultural heritage is not a luxury reserved for times of peace—it is a lifeline to identity and resilience in the darkest of times.

As international bodies debate and governments delay, time is running out for many of Gaza’s historic treasures. CCHP’s efforts provide a blueprint for how to protect heritage under fire: act urgently, empower locals, document rigorously, and advocate globally.

“Heritage cannot wait, and culture cannot wait.” In Gaza, this is more than a slogan—it is a mission carried out with courage, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment.