Revive the Spirit of Mosul
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One year after the black flags of Daesh were lowered over Mosul, I proposed that UNESCO commit to an ambitious initiative to allow this city to rise from the ashes. This programme, launched following the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, aims to “Revive the Spirit of Mosul” since 2018, we have been implementing this programme with the support of the United Arab Emirates, the European Union and all of our partners. It is not just a matter of rebuilding the city and restoring its historical heritage, but also of reopening schools and universities and reviving the cultural and intellectual life of the great cultural capital that is Mosul.

It was essential to restore the emblematic landscape and monuments of this thousand-year-old city, devastated by violence and occupation. After important and complex preparatory work, which even revealed an archaeological treasure of several twelfth-century prayer halls underneath Al-Nuri Mosque, this recovery is now underway.

The reconstruction of the symbolic Al-Habda Minaret, Our Lady of the Hour Church and Al-Tahera Church has just started. And, this summer, work will also begin at Al-Nuri Mosque, now that an architectural project has been selected following an international competition.

At the same time, we are making great progress with the reconstruction of more than one hundred historic houses. Seventy families have already come back to live in the old city, where the voices of children can once again be heard.

Rebuilding these monuments, these buildings, means reviving the very spirit of the city. It means restoring residents’ access to their history – an ancient history of brilliant cultural and religious diversity.

This is all part of the cultural life that we are bringing back, so that Mosul can once again sing, dance, read and express themselves freely. And as a symbol of this renaissance, the University of Mosul now boasts a new film school.

It is also thanks to the power of education that we will be able close the wounds of war. In Mosul, we have rehabilitated schools, as places where we learn to live together.

We are assisting 50,000 students and 1,500 teachers, educators and parents in order to transmit the values of openness and respect – foundations for a peaceful future.

In reconnecting with the spirit of Mosul, we are reviving the spirit of dialogue and discussion that characterizes this city at the crossroads of civilizations. In doing so, we are ensuring that the city again lives up to its name: al-mawsil in Arabic – the link, the junction, the bridge.

That is UNESCO’s very raison d’être, striving for peace in the mind, because as UNESCO’s constitution reminds us, “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.

Preface by Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO
Map of the Old City of Mosul
Revive the Spirit of Mosul: key facts and figures

80% of the Old city of Mosul was destroyed during its occupation by Daesh.

2018 year of the launch of the initiative “Revive the Spirit of Mosul”.

105.5M$ was mobilized by UNESCO to finance the initiative, including $50.4m from the United Arab Emirates and $38.5m from the European Union.

14 UNESCO’s key partner countries and international organisations on this programme.

20 explosive devices have been carefully extracted, including an unexploded bomb which was found underneath the dome of Al Nouri Mosque.

9,940 tons of rubble have been removed from the four main sites (2,480 from Al Tahera Church, 1,600 from Al Saa'a Church and 5,860 from Al Nouri Mosque and Al Hadba minaret).

7,218 historical fragments have been recovered, cleaned and catalogued from the four main sites (4,800 from Al Tahera Church, 1,318 from Al Saa’a Church and 1,100 pieces of Alabaster from Al Nouri Mosque and Al Hadba minaret).

45,000 original bricks have been recovered from Al Nouri Mosque and Al Hadba minaret, and have been cleaned and catalogued for the reconstruction of the Minaret.

83 tons of wood have been used to consolidate the structure of Al Nouri Mosque.

124 historic residential houses in the Old City of Mosul have been rehabilitated or are currently undergoing renovation by UNESCO.

3,152 local jobs created by this UNESCO Initiative.

30% of the Iraqi engineers employed by UNESCO are women.

1,315 people graduates from the Technical Vocational and Education and Training programme.

50,000 in Mosul people trained by UNESCO through cultural and heritage awareness campaigns.

More than 8,000 teachers, educators and parents in Mosul trained in Preventing Violent Extremism through Education (PVE), supporting 50,000 students.

90% of Mosul's students were displaced by the conflict with students and teachers suffering physical violence and psychological trauma.

109 classrooms have been renovated by UNESCO in Nineveh province, which includes the city of Mosul.
A brief history of UNESCO’s Initiative

Mosul, a symbol of multicultural dialogue

Mosul means “the linking point” in Arabic. Over the past 2500 years, the city has been a bridge between regions to the north and south, and to the east and west. Due to its location, it became a melting pot of diverse cultures and groups, a crucible of Iraq’s pluralistic identity marked by the coexistence of its various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups.

The rich heritage of the Old City of Mosul, with its intricate labyrinth of small streets had long been well-preserved with monuments and buildings blending elements of Islamic and Nestorian Christian architecture and decorative arts. The built heritage of the Old City of Mosul reflected the interchange of values of tolerance and coexistence through many centuries.

The architecture of Mosul was characterized by highly decorated brick facades, marble interiors, muqarnas vaults (honeycomb vaulting) and masonry that is often carved with decorative motives and inscriptions, adorning doors, windows and arcades. The local alabaster stone - dubbed as “Mosul marble” – is an example of architectural sophistication that gives Mosul its distinctive character.

The Great al-Nouri Mosque was undoubtedly one of the most significant buildings in the Old City. Its renowned, 45 metre tall al-Hadba Minaret was an iconic architectural landmark and a symbol of Mosul and its inhabitants. Together with the Clock Tower of the Dominican Convent, al-Hadba dominated the skyline of Mosul.

It is because Mosul was so singular, so multicultural, so steeped in interreligious dialogue that it was suddenly targeted by Daesh. The invasion of the city in June 2014, its occupation for three years and the subsequent battle for its liberation in July 2017, caused the destruction of 80% of the Old city.

Thousands of rare books and manuscripts, as well as artefacts from Mosul’s libraries, museums and collections were destroyed or looted.

Mosul lay in ruins, its heritage reduced to rubble, its religious monuments and cultural antiquities damaged, and thousands of its inhabitants displaced, leaving them scarred, in need of massive humanitarian support.

The spirit of Mosul was shattered.

“Revive the Spirit of Mosul”: a global initiative based on three pillars

In February 2018, a Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq was held in Kuwait. The international community announced a strong mobilization for the rehabilitation of the country’s infrastructure. UNESCO stood up to uphold the human dimension.

The Director General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, declared: “Reconstruction will succeed, and Iraq will regain its influence only if the human dimension is given priority; education and culture are the key elements. They are forces of unity and reconciliation.”

“Revive the Spirit of Mosul” is UNESCO’s most ambitious reconstruction campaign in recent decades. It is based on three pillars: heritage, cultural life and education, as essential drivers for the recovery of Mosul.

UNESCO is rebuilding the iconic Al-Nouri Mosque and its Al-Hadba Minaret, Notre-Dame de l’Heure Convent and Al Tahera Church, heritage houses, the Aghawat Mosque as well as Al-Ekhlass school in the Old City of Mosul.

In the field of culture, UNESCO opened a cultural and creative space and relaunched cultural festivals in reading, music performance and open-air cinema screenings.

In the field of education, in addition to the rehabilitation of classrooms, UNESCO has launched a vast program to Prevent Violent Extremism through Education (PVE).

UNESCO’s Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative also benefits local women and men through employment opportunities and on-the-job training linked to the restoration and reconstruction of cultural heritage. This is fundamental for building skills and enhancing social inclusion in Iraq at this critical time.

Donors of the Initiative

15 partners have joined the UNESCO initiative, making it possible to mobilize over 105.5M$:

50,4M$ from United Arab Emirates
38.5M$ from European Union

Over 16.6M$ from other countries and UNESCO funds, including:

Canada
Croatia
France-UNESCO Cooperation Agreement (CFU)
Government of Flanders
Germany
Hungary
International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas

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Italy
Japan
Lithuania
Netherlands
Korea International Cooperation Agency
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

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Netherlands
Korea International Cooperation Agency
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
The Al-Hadba Minaret was built in 1172 by the Seljuk ruler Nur al-Din as part of the religious complex that included Al-Nuri Mosque. It was 45m tall and decorated with ornamental brickwork. Its iconic name “Al-Hadba”, which means “the hunchback” in Arabic, was not given to it until the 14th century, when it became noticeable that the structure was leaning.

Even though other monuments in the complex, over time, underwent renovations the minaret remained untouched. This preserved original parts of the medieval complex which have forever been a prominent landmark for this historic city and a symbol of its cultural value and name.

The visitors strolling on Niniveh Street, the main east-west thoroughfare of the Old City, were guided by the presence of the Al Hadba minaret. The Minaret is also of great national significance and was printed on the country’s ten thousand Dinar banknote.

The destruction of the main part of the Minaret in 2017, which had leaned protectively over this
great city for centuries, was a national tragedy. During the battle for the liberation of Mosul, residents of the city, known as Moslawis, risked their lives by forming a human chain around the site: this act of bravery prevented the complete destruction.

Rebuilding “as it was”

Several experts in the fields of engineering, archaeology, architecture, and geology from Mosul were involved in the development of the reconstruction project. Rigorous consultation processes with the local authorities and other stakeholders were also conducted over the last three years.

UNESCO and the University of Mosul conducted a survey of people of Mosul on the reconstruction of the Al Hadba minaret. 94% of those surveyed wanted to see the Minaret restored exactly as it was before its destruction in 2017.

The first phase of the reconstruction work included in-depth structural, geological, and archaeological studies. Teams also had to secure, clean, and stabilize the remaining base of the Minaret.

The active phase of reconstruction began in March 2022. The Minaret will be rebuilt entirely with bricks, which has not been done for centuries, and in a leaning shape, which is an extraordinarily complex technical challenge.

The result is a state-of-the-art project based on the most advanced engineering practices that will guarantee the stability of the monument, while ensuring that materials and construction techniques are compatible.

3 questions to Maria Rita Acetoso, who leads the UNESCO heritage reconstruction team on the ground in Mosul

Why is the reconstruction of the Minaret a technical challenge?

Maria Rita Acetoso - The Minaret had a 40-metre rounded shaft, with an internal double helicoidal staircase and with decorative panels in carved bricks. It was built straight but, over the centuries, it leaned. This angle has become an important symbol for the people of Mosul. Rebuilding a leaning minaret using an internal steel structure would have already been difficult: doing it with traditional material is even more challenging. And we shall do this on top of the original bases, already affected by severe structural problems before the intentional destruction and left significantly weakened by the massive impact of the explosion.

What technique will you use to succeed in reconstructing it leaning?

The lost shaft will be entirely rebuilt in brick masonry, with local improvements done to improve the connection between the external sections of the cylinder and the inner trunk. The approved angle, which means that the tower extends a distance of 1.6 metres, horizontally, will be reached through a special positioning of the bricks’ rows, while ensuring the horizontal nature of the mortar joints, which are critical for distributing the stresses in a homogenous way, thus avoiding structural damage.

UNESCO also wants to use traditional materials as much as possible, what are they?

The use of brick masonry will ensure the compatibility with the original materials, the respect for the original constructive technique and sustainability and durability of the materials. This will entail, as much as possible, the reuse of historical fragments recovered from the original structure. It will include, of course, the external decorative panels, made of carved bricks. By doing this, we truly hope to restore the true shape of the Minaret back into Mosul’s culture and its urban skyline.

The 3 steps of active reconstruction phase

March 2022 - Consolidation of the remaining base and preparation of the connections to the new foundation.

The end of 2022 - Execution of the new foundation that will connect the base of the Minaret with the bedrock (stable soil) through a concrete belt and a micro-pile system.

Early 2023 - Reconstruction of the lost shaft (cylindrical trunk) done entirely with bricks which are laid by hand.
Al-Nouri Mosque

Since its construction in the second half of the 12th century CE, Al Nouri Mosque was invested with great significance as Mosul’s Great Mosque. It has constituted a core site in the urban life and development of the Old City of Mosul.

In 2014, Daesh rushed to hoist its flag on top of the Mosque’s, and its leader proclaimed the “new caliphate” from its Prayer Hall. The final blow was dealt during Daesh’s retreat in 2017, when the group rushed to detonate a series of explosives inside the Prayer Hall.

Reinstating the Al Nouri Mosque to its rightful place as the main mosque of Mosul is not only an architectural challenge – it is a symbolic act of revival. This reconstruction aims at reviving the sense of belonging and identity of all Moslawis, and the ethos of Mosul as a centre of multicultural creativity.

**A wonderful archaeological discovery**

During the preparatory work by UNESCO there was an exceptional archaeological discovery: four rooms, which were probably used for prayers and ablutions, dating from the 12th century. Previously, their existence was not known.

The story around this discovery begins in August 2021. It was time to study the site to ensure the foundations were safe. Excavation work began near the prayer hall. Gradually, the workers uncovered the original floor of the mosque before its reconstruction in the 1940s. While working on the newly exposed part of the floor, they noticed gaps underneath, which led them to a room which was almost completely buried, under the mosque.

Forty workers and archaeologists from the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) participated in the excavation. The dating of the rooms was possible due to the discovery of coins from the Atabeg era. Some other artifacts were also discovered including jars and pieces of pottery and carved stone.

This remarkable archaeological discovery will be integrated into the design of the reconstructed Al Nouri Mosque. The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq is working with UNESCO to ensure that it is renovated and preserved as a museum where people will be able to learn about the different phases of the mosque’s history.
International Design Competition

In coordination with the Government of Iraq, local partners and international experts, the preparatory phase of the rehabilitation of these iconic monuments started in Autumn 2018. The first steps included the demining of the damaged site, and the removal of hazardous materials. The rubble was then sifted to allow for the identification and preservation of valuable fragments that could be reused in reconstruction. This process was conducted under the guidance of international experts. Salvaged structural elements were stored and restored by Iraq’s Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

On site Experts also conducted structural investigations and documented their findings to plan for reconstruction and restoration. In parallel, the site was stabilized and made ready for the active reconstruction phase.

A 2020 survey of residents showed that 70% of the people of Mosul wished to see the Al Nouri Prayer Hall rebuilt as it was before but with some improvements. The public wanted assurances that the essential features and main volumes of the structure would be preserved.

UNESCO launched an International Competition for the selection of the design of Al Nouri Mosque. The winners, an Egyptian team of four partners selected in April 2021, are currently finalizing the detailed design expected to be completed by April 2022. The active reconstruction phase of the mosque will start in the summer of 2022.

Testimonials from Moslawis:
“This heritage attaches us to the roots of our ancestors”

Shaima Abdul Munaim, 50-year-old, lives in the old city. Her house is near Al-Nuri Mosque. She says: “When the minaret was destroyed, I couldn’t eat for three days, I was weeping and in mourning.”

“The leaning minaret is our heritage and an icon and symbol of Mosul. We had all the sweet memories related to the prayer time in the mosque. Since I was a little girl, we used to go to the market and on the way back we would stop in the mosque to drink water”, remembers Shaima.

For her, “Ramadhan is different there. We go to the mosque for prayers, neighbours exchange dishes so we are all like one big family”.

52-year-old Noor al-Din Nadeem, who is a father to three boys and a daughter adds: “The minaret is not only important to Moslawis but to all Iraqis. Al-Nuri Mosque connects us to the roots of our fathers and ancestors. Its reconstruction fills families with hope again.”

He has this wish: “That we built a historical and religious school in the vicinity of this area to teach our children about the love of this city and to get reconnected to their true heritage.”

Al Aghawat Mosque: funds need to be found

With the generous support from Germany, UNESCO also started emergency works to stabilize and consolidate the Al Aghawat Mosque complex, another Old City’s monument that deserves to be conserved as a significant example of the 18th Century religious architecture in Mosul.

Structural emergency measures were designed and implemented, including scaffolding in the main hall to support the main dome, a propping system to ensure there is stability in the vaults around the collapsed area, as well as the consolidation of the southern wall. By January 2022, this work to safeguard and catalogue the original architectural elements was complete.

However, the full restoration and rehabilitation of the mosque and its minaret towards requires additional financial support, estimated at USD 2.8 million. UNESCO has appealed to donors for these funds.
Al-Saa’a Church

In 1870, the first pontifical mission was sent to Mesopotamia. It founded in Mosul the Convent of Our Lady of the Hour – Couvent Notre-Dame de L’Heure – also known as the Latin Church. From its origin, this convent had three dimensions: religious, cultural and social. It included a church, a seminary with accommodation for a community of brothers and a community of sisters, a school for boys, a school for girls, as well as a hospital and a house for mission employees. A school for women teachers was then added.

The Dominicans had no books for teaching. So, rather than importing European books, they decided to create the first printing press in Mesopotamia in Mosul. They published the first Bible in Arabic, the first Kurdish grammar book and many other texts of local interest.

In 1876, Empress Eugenie of France de Montijo, the wife of Napoleon III, financed the construction of the bell tower – the first bell tower built in Iraq – which was installed in 1880, including the famous four-dial clock. The clock’s name was also given to the local neighbourhood and its chimes have add rhythm to people’s lives across the entire city throughout the centuries.

The structure of the Al-Saa’a Church was damaged during the occupation of the city by Daesh and its convent was looted and ransacked.

The 2 steps of active reconstruction phase

- **March 2022** - Stabilization of the Church and rehabilitation of the exterior finishing layers of the Complex
- **Second semester of 2022** - Rehabilitation of the interiors of the Complex and of the entire services system: electrical, air conditioning, water and sewage.
Putting local communities at the heart of reconstruction

In September 2020, in close collaboration with the Dominican Order and relevant Iraqi authorities, UNESCO launched the preparatory phase for the reconstruction. The priority was to secure the site and clear it from unexploded ordnance. It was followed by the preparation of the detailed design for the execution of the works. The final design of the project site was the subject of numerous bilateral consultations with experts and local stakeholders, allowing the designs to satisfy local expectations and generate a sense of local ownership. The active phase of reconstruction will start in March 2022.

The Project, along with Al-Tahera Church, has so far created more than 1,000 jobs in the local area – exceeding the project’s initial job-creation target, with most activities being conducted by local teams of experts and workers. This has enhanced local opportunities for skills development.

Rehabilitation of the House of Prayer

In 2022, UNESCO in collaboration with ALIPH will also rehabilitate the building called “House of Prayer”, bordering the Convent, as a multipurpose educational and cultural centre for the local community. It will contribute to the overall impact of strengthening the Moslawis capacity, including minorities, to lead the recovery of their city, safeguard their heritage and benefit from a peaceful coexistence.

3 questions to Frère Olivier, representative of the Dominican order in Mosul

What makes Mosul unique?

Frère Olivier - Mosul has always been a meeting place – a place where different paths converge. It’s in the very etymology of the word: Mosul means crossroads. Here, the architecture expresses the multiculturalism of society. The Convent of Our Lady of the Hour was built by both Christians and Muslims. Over the last two decades it became a sanctuary frequented by the faithful of both religions. This is what characterizes Mosul: the city is a mosaic, marked by different hues which form a harmonious design. These links were shattered by the war. Today, we want to rediscover them.

What are the challenges of the Our Lady of the Hour project?

When the reconstruction of Mosul began, we were worried this part of our heritage would be forgotten. Without the drive of UNESCO, and the financial support of the United Arab Emirates, the reconstruction of the Convent would never have been considered. The initiative ‘Revive the Spirit of Mosul’ gives rise to so much hope because it’s rebuilding the city’s morale. Rebuilding the city together is a way of rebuilding society. We want these sites to rediscover their purpose, to help breathe life into the three elements at the heart of the first Pope’s Mission to Mesopotamia – the religious, the cultural, and the social. This Convent has always been open to all, to people from all sectors of society, and of all faiths, and to women just as it is to men.

Women seem to have an important place in the convent, can you tell us why?

In traditional societies it’s important to have places in which women can come and go freely, and this includes religious sites. Our Lady of the Hour hosted the first school for girls in Mesopotamia, and also the first college for female teachers. These Iraqi women then fanned out across the whole of the Plain of Nineveh, and also went up into the mountains as far as Zakho in order to establish schools in the villages. Our mission has not changed. Today, there are 150 Dominican Sisters in Iraq, who follow the same type of instruction. Our most important raw material, is humanity.
Al-Tahera Church

An iconic symbol woven into the history of Mosul, Al-Tahera Church was built in 1859 and opened in 1862. Its multiple altars, dining room, two sacristy rooms and the mezzanine floor that occupies the Church's western side set it aside from other churches of the same period.

The Church underwent renovation about 100 years after its construction. Its external walls were finished with stone. The tribunes were built to accommodate school students during the great celebrations. Also, it has been painted inside.

The Church was severely damaged in 2017. The reconstruction work is quite complex as the roof collapsed, large parts of its arcades were destroyed, as well as its external walls.

The first step of the project, which began in 2019, consisted of destroying the remaining parts of its concrete roof which were in danger of collapsing. The 650m² site was then demined and temporary stabilized. The workers cleared the rubble and sorted the fragments to recover all the elements of heritage interest. This work was carried out by local contractors, under the supervision of qualified experts.

Similarly to Al Saa'a Church project, Al-Tahera project has been carried out in line with local community expectations and both cultural and religious history. It will be reconstructed as it was. Design was completed and approved by the Christian Waqf and Minister of Culture of Iraq at end of September 2021. The preparatory works concluded in October 2021. The active phase of restoration and reconstruction started in March 2022.

The safeguarding of manuscripts by Father Najeeb

The library in Mosul originally housed a unique collection of ancient manuscripts dating back to the 9th century in addition to printed books from 1515. Multi-faith in origin, the archive contained not only ancient Syrian and Aramaic Christian texts, but also Muslim, Jewish and Yezidi papers on history, mathematics, history and literature.

When Daesh arrived in Mosul in 2014, Father Najeeb, Chaldean archbishop of Mosul and many of his supporters were able to remove 800 manuscripts and flee to Erbil. Since then, they have been restoring and digitizing the ancient manuscripts of Mosul. UNESCO supports him in this project, with the financial support of Hungary and Lithuania, by opening a Conservation Laboratory, providing technical equipment and training in conservation and restoration techniques for his staff and volunteers.

“The archives of the Digital Centre of Eastern Manuscripts embody the Spirit of Mosul: a spirit of trust, confidence and peaceful co-existence between Iraq’s numerous communities,” explained Father Najeeb. “It is essential to preserve and give public access to these archives so that in building the future, the history of interaction between communities is remembered and can serve as an inspiration. This support has enabled to further strengthen our capacity to protect this rich cultural heritage,” added Najeeb.

More than 8,000 manuscripts from 105 different collections from Iraq, Turkey and Iran are being digitized. Currently there are circa 10,000 manuscripts still to be conserved and archived.
Heritage houses

“Revive the spirit of Mosul” also means bringing the old city back to life by allowing residents to return in their homes that were destroyed during the war.

UNESCO is restoring and rebuilding 124 historic houses, with the generous support of the European Union. This intervention is global: reconstruction concerns walls, as well as upgrading of electrical network, septic tanks, drainage, road surfacing and public lighting.

Before rebuilding, the neighbourhood had to be cleared. So far, 2107 tons of rubble and 21 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) have been removed.

The reconstruction of 44 first heritage houses is nearly complete. They are gradually hand over to their owners. The rehabilitation and reconstruction of the 80 additional heritage houses have started in September 2021 and progressing well. All these works are done using traditional techniques and materials, to preserve the identity of the old town.

This project is also generating a lot of jobs. UNESCO launched an apprenticeship programme to encourage youth employment in the fields of bricklaying, masonry, electrical installation and carpentry. So far 587 young men and women have been provided with this training.

In addition, an apprenticeship programme for marble, stone and alabaster carvers was launched in July 2020 to support seven small-to-medium enterprises in Mosul under the supervision of the Department of Labour and Social Affairs.

Families return to old Mosul

“67 families, a total of 305 people, benefit from the first phase of rebuilding houses. In the second phase we will have 80 houses rebuilt to shelter around 110 families that consist of over 400 people,” says Bahaa Hussain Ali, UNESCO’s social coordinator.

Ahmad Waad, 35 years, is one of the beneficiaries who has just moved into his newly rebuilt house. He lives with his wife, their child and his brother and mother. “During the war, the destruction was very frightening. All the rooms of my house collapsed. Moreover, we didn’t have access to basic things, such as electricity and water. There were only hills of rubbles and destroyed houses,” explained Ahmad.

He remembered: “We fled to the Hulaia camp [for Internally Displaced People]. We stayed there for two months. Then we were hosted by my uncle in al-Yarmok neighbourhood. I couldn’t stay at my uncle’s for very long so I rented a house in Hirmat quarter and stayed there for three years. Mosul was liberated in 2017, but I couldn’t come back, the city was destroyed and there was no work here. But one day, in 2019, I got a call from my neighbour saying that my house will be rebuilt by UNESCO. I couldn’t believe my ears!”

Today, Ahmad is, once again, living in the house where he was born in: “My house was rebuilt in one year. I received it in September 2021. It’s a new life that begins. There is nothing better than the smell of my neighbourhood.”
The spirit of Mosul is made of living heritage and a vibrant cultural life, from traditional music festivals to booksellers on the streets. UNESCO and its partners have engaged in a comprehensive plan to restore cultural life and cultural institutions. Cinema, Music, and all creative industries are at the heart of this work.

In autumn 2019, UNESCO organised the first cultural festival in Mosul since its occupation by Daesh began in 2014. It was held on Al Najafi street, which is famous for its open-air book market and considered as a centre of cultural life in the city. UNESCO’s Heritage Emergency Fund financed multiple events, including the launch of a documentary film, “Long Live the Music”, and music-related activities.

To support the revival of traditional music in Mosul, UNESCO launched the “Listening to Iraq” programme, in partnership with the NGO Action for Hope. It provided training to 24 musicians from Mosul, leading to the creation of four ensembles who benefited from grants for music touring in Iraq.

A new milestone was held in March 2022: the “Mosul Traditional Music Festival” taken place in the Old City, including concerts in an heritage house fully rehabilitated. It was the first event of its kind since the Liberation.

With the support of the European Union, and in partnership with the Theatre of Ghent in Belgium, UNESCO established a cinema department in the Fine Arts College of Mosul University. 20 Students have been trained and while producing nine short movie got hands-on experience on each of the different roles that define the fundamental aspects of a cinema production: director, screenwriter, editor, actor, set and costume design, audio and light technician and production assistant. Moreover, a creative space called “The Station” has been constructed and furnished in June 2021. It serves as a hub for young people working on cultural and creative industries to meet, learn and exchange ideas. Many events such as concerts, workshops, and exhibitions are taking place in the space.

Testimonials from a cinema student

Kawthar Ahmad Yassin, 27 years old, studies in the cinema department. “I love filming as it reflects the situation of Mosul and to reach all around the world. Our community is a conservative one that objects the appearance of women on TV, this is a major challenge for us young women,” she explained.

“Yet, my parents encourage me to do what I like and always tell me to neglect the negative comments I see on social media pertaining my work. My father advises me always with these words: do what you love and don’t listen to people opinions,” Kawthar added. She worked in “Eyes of the Darkness” film as a director, then she made the film “Noora” about child’s sexual abuse, homeless children and child labor.

Faryal Ahmad, 23 years old, is also a cinema student. “I implicated my mother in a film. Then my whole family supported me. We are a family that loves art. My film is called “Faslya”, a word to describe paying amount of money or donating girls to another family to resolve a dispute. I wish I work more in cinema as my passion really to be a camera woman,” said Faryal.
“The reader does not steal and the thief does not read”
Iraqi proverb.
Preventing Violent Extremism

“Revive the Spirit of Mosul” is also about ensuring a safe learning environment for every child. Iraq is going through a period of transition. Most children have missed three years of education, from 2014 to 2017, while those who stayed in school were exposed to the violent and extreme ideology of Daesh.

To undo some of the damage, UNESCO launched the project ‘Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education’, implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Stichting ZOA and the Iraqi Institution for Development and Ulster University.

This project strengthens primary school teachers’ and learners’ resilience to violent extremism ideologies and their commitments to non-violence and peace through appropriate educational strategies.

The aim is to develop cognitive and behavioural skills - such as critical thinking, multi-perspective, understandings of complexity, moral courage and responsible online behaviour.

UNESCO has already trained 2,000 primary school teachers in 130 schools, 750 secondary school teachers in 50 schools, as well as school principals, 5,400 parents (75% women). And 50,000 children and youth were sensitized with educational messaging through social media.

With support from the European Union, UNESCO is also working on access to quality primary and secondary education for the community, including addressing the needs of refugees, the displaced and others.

This effort aims to create a safe and conducive learning environment in schools, strengthening teaching capacity, providing textbooks and learning materials to school age children, improving children’s well-being through psychosocial support and reducing the risk of unexploded ordnance and mines to children by raising awareness.
Al Ekhlas Primary School

Al Ekhlas Primary School has been a fixture in the west side of the Old City of Mosul for nearly 60 years. In 2016, the students and their families saw their dreams of a promising future crumble under the weight of war and destruction.

With the support of the European Union, UNESCO is rebuilding this school. Students, parents and school administrators contributed their ideas for the design through a consultative process. The first milestone was reached in January 2020 when ARCO (Architecture and Cooperation) completed the design of Al Ekhlas.

Reconstruction work is now underway. When it reopens, the school will follow UNESCO’s Happy School framework, promoting a culture of peace and reconciliation that starts in the classroom.

Testimonials from Mosul teachers

“The Moslawi community has just survived a psychological crisis that led pupils to refuse the idea of going back to school and get in a curriculum. We had in our primary school some pupils who suffered from psychological issues we couldn’t handle. We lost several learners and we also had students with hardline extreme mentality,” said Faris Abdulla, 46 years, Yarimja primary school teacher.

“UNESCO’s Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) training taught us how to solve issues like the hate against the school, the community, and learning as a whole. It has given us keys to talk to our students, going to their families to sit down with them and being close to them. We were able through the activities and dialogue to bring them to the right track and convince them back to school,” explained Faris.

Maha Abid Hssain, 52 years old, works on many activities to encourage the group work and exchanging ideas among pupils. “I use the activities that I learned in the training: implicating them in doing painting, drawing and design. I want to promote the love of the country, encouraging them to study and specify their targets for the future. Now, they start to love the school and to spend more than the class time of 40 minutes with me,” said Maha.

The Islamic education teacher Mohammed Hilal Ahmad, 43 years old, mentioned the challenges that he is still facing with some of the students. “I receive 40-50 questions every day from the pupils about religion and about some delicate matters that can’t be uttered from a small child mind by themselves but from relative adults”, detailed Mohammed. “UNESCO’s techniques paid off in a really good effect. The drawing and other techniques I also use in the classroom reduce the quarrels and troubles among the students. Pupils have got more enthusiasm to learn more and work out among each other by the energy that they have in them,” he added.
UNESCO has also launched a Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programme in Mosul for adults which associates general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills which are relevant to the world of work. The project addresses the problems of a lack of training opportunities and a lack of skills for unemployed youth in urban areas.

1,315 trainees were already reached, of which 18% were women. They will graduate in competency-based technical and vocational training in construction throughout the project. 80% of the graduates will join on-site work-based training on rehabilitating historic buildings.

The skills acquired are relevant to the broader construction industry and will increase trainees’ chances of future employment. Reconstruction projects are also major sources of employment. Heritage and homes reconstruction projects are major employment pools for these trainees. UNESCO has already created 3,152 jobs since the start of the Initiative – and at least a thousand more are already planned.

**Young Moslawis learned a new job**

Rayan Riadh Ahmad, 33 years, is a technical institute graduate. His brother was murdered by Daesh. "When the city was liberated, I had no more hope and I couldn’t find a job. But, in 2019, I heard about TVET and applied. A couple of months later, I got the call to join a training in the masonry department which lasted for 45 days. This training opportunity came with a first job: a work monitor in Shams alhumam company which was also funded by UNESCO. After the completion of this contract, I was ready to find a job myself. I applied for Sami company and I work there now. TVET really affected my life in a positive way," said the young man.

The Technical, vocational and educational training (TVET) supports the inhabitants of the Old City, but also of Mosul and the region as a whole. "We receive the names from the vocational institute or from the unemployment database. So that trainees can learn a new work while supporting their families, they will also receive an amount of money as par diem expenses," explained Raya Issa, the TVET supervisor. "We make proposals adapted to each one. For example, women are trained to work on plastering, electricity and tiling," added the supervisor.

Yarub Sameer, 28 years, who has got a master degree in plantation technology, has also got a job opportunity with the TVET program by UNESCO: "I started at the beginning of 2021, as a trainee. As I already had qualifications at an academic level, I was not doing manual work. I did the training on colouring and amending alabaster. I got the opportunity to meet people and build up a network of contacts. I am working now independently with Shams alhumam company." "My work is decorating, amending and colouring the alabaster," said Yarub. "One day, a 68-year-old man told me that he remembers scratching his house yard alabaster with his nail to form something to remember for his sons and grandsons. Me and my friends developed an idea to create ‘save the heritage’ voluntary team to help preserve the Moslawi heritage and relics. We rebuild and resurrect the memories of people whose memories got attached to these pieces of alabaster."

Iman Taha, aged 27, is also working on alabaster work. She is divorced and supports her child, her dead sister’s children in addition to her mother. "My mother didn’t like the idea of me working on construction sites, where usually only men work. But she allowed me to work when she came at the beginning and saw other young women working here," said Iman. Then, the young ladies of TVET training have agreed to work together on creating their own private work independently.**

**Re-establishing a set of heritage professionals and craftsmen**

UNESCO also implemented a training program with the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the University of Mosul which responds to the need to re-establish a pool of heritage professionals and craftsmen in Mosul, as well as to ensure their direct involvement in the reconstruction process.

The training program targets two categories of workers: 50 local professionals – architects, engineers, and archaeologists – who should be involved in assessing and documenting the damages, and in defining needed interventions. It was also aimed at 70 local craftsmen, as key players in the actual execution of restoration and reconstruction works.

The first step was launched in 2021, including a map of the most common historical materials and constructive techniques in Mosul, and a complete assessment of craftsmanship in Mosul, in order to evaluate the actual needs, especially in stone masonry, alabaster restoration, plaster, metal works, and carpentry.

A 3-day workshop, including site visits and field exercises is also planned.
Other actions of UNESCO in Iraq

Supporting education
UNESCO works across Iraq to advance progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 on the right to Quality Education for All. Four secondary schools in Baghdad, with some 2,500 pupils, belong to UNESCO’s Associated Schools Network, the ASPNET.

There are two UNESCO chairs in Iraq designed to complement the Organization’s work on the prevention of violent extremism through education (PVE-E). At the University of Kufa in the Najaf governate, UNESCO maintains a Chair on the Development of Inter-Religious Dialogue Studies in the Islamic World, and at the University of Baghdad it maintains a UNESCO Chair on Genocide Prevention Studies in the Islamic World.

With the support of European Union and UNICEF, UNESCO is supporting Iraq in the use of ICTs. It has helped the Ministry of Education to develop and roll-out a customized Educational Management Information System (EMIS) and 3,000 laptops with SIM cards have been procured for schools. UNESCO has also produced 50 online tutorials, 92 sets of classroom training materials, and 32 knowledge base articles in Arabic and English on the EMIS.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO has trained a pool of 65 Master Trainers from the Ministry of Education in distance Learning pedagogies. In return, these Master Trainers with UNICEF support are delivering training to 4,000 teachers in Baghdad, Basra, Thi Qar and Qadissiyah.

Further, an Educational TV studio, meant for teacher training and education lessons broadcasting was fully rehabilitated in Baghdad, including a training hall and the provision of equipment. Over 5,600 distance lessons were produced.

Protecting journalists
In line with UNESCO’s mandate to “promote the free flow of ideas by word and image”, the organisation strives to foster freedom of expression, media development, and access to information and knowledge in Iraq.

UNESCO is working in close collaboration with the Iraqi authorities to enhance the safety of journalists by enabling the freedom of movement of journalists as well as training for some 75 journalists (50% women) on physical safety and digital security.

In order to support community media in Iraq, UNESCO helps the community radios to develop programmes for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. Through this project, UNESCO trains community radios in conflict-sensitive and ethical reporting.

Basra Initiative
UNESCO also launched the revitalization of the Old City of Basra, in southern Iraq, through the same approach as the Mosul Initiative, with skills development and job creation for urban youth mobilized in the recovery of urban cultural heritage.

Twelve historical “Shanasheel Houses” whose typology and constructive characteristics are typical of early 20th century Basra architecture, as well as the Al-Ashar canal which runs through the heart of the Old City, its bridges, and its embankments, are the object of the intervention.

UNESCO provides skills training and on-the-job qualifying experience for TVET graduates and community youth through conservation and rehabilitation works on the built heritage of the Old City. A centre for women’s empowerment and the preservation of traditional handicrafts was just established in Basra in February 2022.

Support for the Iraq National Museum
As part of the efforts to support museums in Iraq, UNESCO provided in 2021 equipment, conservation and storage materials to the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad, to contribute to the Museum’s efforts to safeguard and promote its invaluable collection.

In January 2022, a major new piece was added to its collection: the Gilgamesh tablet, returned by the United States to Iraq under the aegis of UNESCO.

The National Museum is dedicated to the collection and interpretation of the history of Iraq and its environs. The collections consist of mainly man-made objects covering the past 7,000 years. The types of objects in the collection represent Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Islamic cultures.

With the armed conflict in March 2003, the National Museum suffered significant damage, leading to the loss of many of its objects through looting. The Museum management staff has estimated that about 15,000 items were stolen. After the destruction and pillaging that occurred in 2003, UNESCO has worked closely with Iraqi professionals to renovate it. To date, according to the National Museum of Iraq, 4,300 looted objects have been returned.

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World Heritage

UNESCO works with Iraq to help preserve its heritage beyond Mosul and Basra, notably its six World Heritage sites. The three Iraqi World Heritage sites inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger which require particular attention are Hatra, Ashur (Qal‘at Sherqat), and Samarra Archaeological City. Iraq has three other sites inscribed on the World Heritage List: Babylon, Erbil Citadel, and The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and the Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

UNESCO and its Member States also recognize and protect cultural practices, as Intangible Cultural Heritage, including arts, crafts, festivals and traditions, that contribute to the identity and social cohesion of countries and communities. In Iraq, five such practices are inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Khidr Elias feast and its vows, Provision of services and hospitality during the Arba‘in visitation, Traditional craft skills and arts of Al-Naoor, Nawrouz, and Iraqi Maqam.

Creative Cities

Two Iraqi cities, Baghdad and Slemani, have joined UNESCO’s Network of Creative Cities to date. UNESCO established the Network in 2004 to promote cooperation among the world’s cities, recognizing creativity as a motor for sustainable urban development. Both Iraqi cities are Cities of literature, fully committed to supporting the vibrancy of their literary scenes, their publishing industries and other literature-related activities.