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**THE OLIVE ROADS: ITINERARY OF CULTURE
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, DIALOGUE AND PEACE
AMONG THE PEOPLES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN**

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the Executive Board in response to a proposal by Greece.

An explanatory note, reproduced below, contains recommendations in paragraphs 10 and 11.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Introduction

1. The olive – one of the wonders of nature, a mythical tree sacred for the three monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean, a material and spiritual reference point for human beings and a universal symbol of peace and reconciliation – is central to daily life in many countries, shaping a wide variety of natural landscapes and living cultures.

2. The importance of this project rests on the idea that cultural landscapes, seen as “bearing witness to humanity’s creative genius, technical, economic and social development, imagination and spiritual vitality”, have had a direct or indirect link with olive cultivation in the Mediterranean basin from antiquity to the present day.

The context

A. Historical background

3. In the times of the Egyptian god Râ, in the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and in churches and mosques, olive oil was regarded as sacred by the Phoenicians, Hittites, Greeks, and other peoples of antiquity.

4. The supply of oil was one of the main objectives around which commerce was organized in ancient times, and this remains the case to the present day. All along these land and sea routes, a heritage common to the peoples concerned and to humanity as a whole is found in the ports and the towns of the Mediterranean, in the bazaars and markets, in the fields where olives are cultivated and the equipment for harvesting them, in the traditional or modern methods of olive production, in the pressing and preparation and in the transportation and storage of olive oil.

5. The artistic, symbolic and religious heritage linked to the olive tree takes in extraordinary creations such as oil and amphoras, glass and ceramic lamps, perfume vases and other artistic objects that – as testified by museums, churches and private collections – have marked the civilization of oil from antiquity to modern times.

6. It is worth remembering that the Mediterranean now has 500 million trees out of a total of 650 million worldwide. Sizeable populations live or supplement their income by cultivating the olive. Ancient practices mingle with modern techniques and know-how. The “Olive Roads” project, roads of dialogue, cultural and sustainable development, will testify to the historical, human, economic, cultural and spiritual influence that this magnificent tree has exercised and continues to exercise in the world. Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, Croatia, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Portugal, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey are among the countries and communities located at the centre of this project.

B. A few examples of implementation

7. Various initiatives – both tangible and intangible – have already been taken in Greece and other countries under the “Olive Roads” project. To mention a few examples:

- (a) the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Messinia (Peloponnese-Greece) has taken the initiative of promoting, in the field of culture, commerce and tourism, a long-term cooperation project among the peoples of the Mediterranean called the “Olive Roads”. Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco,

Portugal, Spain, France and Italy are among the countries that have so far come together in support of this project, which has already organized four itineraries (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) with the participation of motorcyclists, cars and a mobile museum on a lorry specially fitted out for the project;

- (b) contacts have been made between people from different countries and cities, trade and friendship agreements have been signed, activities – cultural and otherwise – have been initiated and local institutions (town councils, cultural associations, associations for the protection of nature, etc.) have responded to the call, thereby serving to promote UNESCO ideals such as dialogue among cultures and civilizations;
- (c) the “Olive Roads” project comes under the “Cultural Olympiad”, being organized by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, in partnership with UNESCO, alongside the Olympic Games (Athens, 2004). A cultural and commercial meeting was held from 27 to 29 September 2002 entitled “Life cycles in sight of the olive tree” within the framework of the “European Heritage Days”;
- (d) the emblem of the Olympic Games 2004 is an olive branch or *kotinos*, an olive branch intertwined in a circle. The *kotinos* is directly linked to the history of the Olympic Games of antiquity since it was the prize awarded to the victors. It also represents the sacred tree of the city of Athens;
- (e) the emblem of the International Olympic Truce Foundation (IOTF) is a dove carrying in its beak an olive branch or *kotinos*;
- (f) the “Olive Roads” project is supported by the authorities of the Greek Government and by various public and private institutions in that country; it is receiving, in particular, support from the Hellenic Ministry of Development and Tourism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the City and Academy of Athens, as well as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Messinia.

Objectives

8. The objectives of the “Olive Roads” project are:

- (a) to highlight the shared material and spiritual heritage that has linked the peoples of the Mediterranean since prehistoric times, centred on the olive tree and its many uses;
- (b) to support efforts to ensure that traditional knowledge is respected and protected and that the environment and natural resources are wisely managed;
- (c) to guarantee the protection of renewable ecosystems with a view to their sustainable exploitation, this being an essential requirement for the full physical, economic and cultural development of the peoples concerned;
- (d) to explore the cultural and symbolic use of the olive tree both within and outside these areas of exploitation.

9. These objectives are consonant with:

- (a) the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, in particular Articles 3, 8 and 12 and main line of action 14 of its action plan, namely that of “respecting and protecting traditional knowledge, in particular that of indigenous peoples; recognizing

the contribution of traditional knowledge, particularly with regard to environmental protection and the management of natural resources, and fostering synergies between modern science and local knowledge”;

- (b) the Declaration and Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 4 September 2002), which advocate the promotion of “dialogue and cooperation among the world’s civilizations and peoples ...”;
- (c) the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations on “Culture and Development” (A/RES/5/249, 20 December 2002), which emphasizes the need to “reinforce the potential of culture as a means of achieving prosperity, sustainable development and world coexistence in peace ...”;
- (d) the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2002);
- (e) the Barcelona Declaration (1995) and the follow-up process;
- (f) the Euro-Mediterranean project of the European Union.

Recommendation

10. Greece, as a Mediterranean country and member of the European Union, appreciative of UNESCO’s efforts to protect the world cultural and natural heritage and mindful of the symbolism and exceptional significance of the olive tree as an emblem of peace, reconciliation, prosperity and spirituality for all the peoples of the Mediterranean and of the whole world, would like the “Olive Roads” project to be recognized by UNESCO with a view to increasing the visibility and impact of the Organization’s action and strengthening solidarity among peoples.

11. In view of the relevance of the proposal, the Executive Board may like to recommend that the “Olive Roads” project be included in document 32 C/5, Subprogramme IV.1.1: Promotion of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and implementation of its Action Plan, and Subprogramme IV.1.2: Strengthening the links between cultural policies and development policies.