Report on Israeli Occupation Violations against Palestinian Cultural Scene for the year 2023

Ministry of Culture: The occupation is waging a comprehensive war to eradicate Palestinian culture and heritage

The Palestinian Ministry of Culture issued a report at the end of the year 2023 summarizing Israeli violations against the cultural sector in Palestine. Dr. Atef Abu Saif, the Minister of Culture, stated, "Israel is conducting a systematic and targeted campaign aimed directly at the culture and heritage sector, targeting both its material and non-material components, with the intent of erasing national memory, distorting facts, and combating the Palestinian narrative." Abu Saif emphasized that all the occupation's policies will not change the eternal and everlasting truth that Palestine belongs to the Palestinians, its native inhabitants. Abu Saif stated that the systematic war waged by the occupying state against our people is a continuation of the catastrophe that began seventy-five years ago and is still ongoing. During this war, they continued to steal heritage, artifacts, and cultural possessions, as well as looting and pillaging our people's achievements and opposing our national narrative.

The Ministry of Culture, in its report issued this evening, included a set of Israeli measures that constitute the most prominent violations against the cultural sector, including:

1. Assassination and killing of artists and writers and the arrest of some based on their artistic works and content.
2. Settlement and Judaization, especially in archaeological sites and old towns in Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, and Sebestia.
3. Destruction of historical and archaeological buildings and museums.
4. Destruction of operational squares, memorials, and artistic works in public squares and artistic murals.
5. Theft of antiquities and archaeological findings in Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, and Gaza during the ongoing war.

6. Demolition of cultural institutions, theaters, printing presses, art galleries, libraries, publishing houses, and archive centers.
7. Closure of cultural institutions and working entities in the cultural sector in Jerusalem.
8. Prohibition of cultural activities in Jerusalem
9. Deprivation of the ability to travel to participate in cultural events within Palestine and preventing many artists and writers from traveling to participate in foreign cultural events.

The report highlighted that **the occupation forces targeted the landmarks of Palestinian cities,** bombarding public squares, monuments, memorials, gardens, and artistic murals. Dozens of attacks on artistic works and memorials in public squares were recorded, especially in the city of Gaza. The army destroyed all memorials in public squares along Rashid Street, from the Sudanese junction in northern Gaza to Wadi Gaza Bridge. They also excavated and destroyed the Unknown Soldier Park in the Sand neighbourhood and its famous memorial, along with the destruction of the Phoenix statue in the heart of Palestine Square in Gaza, which signifies Gaza City's emblem. Additionally, they targeted the artistic sculpture "Alphabet" in the Tal al-Hawa area and destroyed the memorial for the Six Martyrs in Jabalia Camp, among others. The occupation state followed the exact mechanism in targeting public squares and memorials in the West Bank, such as targeting critical landmarks in the city of Jenin, including the Martyrs' Squares, and destroying and stealing the iron statue "Jenin Horse," created by the German sculptor Thomas Kilpper, from the remnants of the occupation's invasion of Jenin city and its camp in 2002. This statue stands as evidence of the occupation's crimes.

The occupation policies also had an impact on the halt of many cultural activities due to the repeated invasions and various massacres committed in different areas. The Soap Festival in Nablus city, which was scheduled to be held in April as part of the Ministry of Culture's preparations to register soap-making as part of the world heritage list, was cancelled due to the city's invasion. All celebrations for National Heritage Day during the ongoing war against our people were also cancelled, in addition to the cancellation of the National Theater Festival scheduled for November.

Throughout the year, a significant number of artists, writers, and creators were martyred during the occupation's massacres against our people. The ministry was able to document the martyrdom of 44 individuals working in the cultural sector, including artists and writers. Four of them were in the

West Bank, with the majority concentrated in Gaza during the ongoing genocide against our people there. These individuals included poets, novelists, writers, and members of dabke dance groups, including children's groups. The targets included prominent literary and artistic figures who significantly enriched Palestinian culture, including poets, visual artists, and musicians.

The arrest and detention of artists continued, as Israeli forces arrested 9 creative individuals due to their artistic productions, including singing and music, along with content creators, especially in the West Bank.

Israeli violations also included the destruction of historical, archaeological, and cultural buildings. The total count of destroyed structures in Gaza reached 207, which can be categorized as follows: (144 buildings in the old town of Gaza City, including buildings that gave the city its historical identity, such as Al-Qaisaria, Al-Zawia Market, Al-Samra Bath, Sabt Al-Alami, and Al-Basha Palace; 25 buildings, churches, mosques, and archaeological sites, including Al-Omari Mosque, Saint Porphyrius Church, and the Mosque of Sayyid Hashem, where the grandfather of the Prophet is buried, Katib Wilaiah Mosque, and others; 26 cultural centers and theaters; 9 publishing houses and libraries; and 3 artistic and media production companies). Museums such as Al-Qarrara Museum, Rafah Museum, Al-Badia Museum, Al-Mt'haf Museum, and Al-Basha Museum were also targeted. Additionally, memorials and public squares in the West Bank and Gaza were destroyed, alongside the destruction of many historical buildings during the invasion of the old town of Nablus. The Central Archive headquarters of Gaza City was also destroyed.

Occupation forces raided 14 cultural centers in the West Bank, including the confiscation and destruction of contents in two libraries, their closure, and attacks on over 5 institutions in Jerusalem. They also invaded and dispersed numerous cultural events and gatherings.

Israeli authorities continued to deprive Palestinian writers, intellectuals, and artists from traveling, thereby preventing their participation in various events and representing Palestine on international platforms. Many Arab writers, artists, and publishers were also banned from participating in the Palestine International Book Fair organized by the ministry in September 2023. Additionally,

hundreds of writers from Gaza were deprived of participating in ministry events in Ramallah, especially the Novel Forum, National Culture Day, and the Book Fair.

In Jerusalem, the cultural scene suffers from continuous attempts to distort and manipulate history and archaeological sites and the suppression of cultural activities in all forms. Furthermore, the occupation authorities increased the budget allocated for settlement activities that affect Arab culture in Jerusalem, reaching 284 million dollars. The occupation's interest in Jerusalem includes allocating approximately 20 million shekels for developing parks and recreational complexes and 32 million shekels to the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage to construct public buildings in the city.

The occupation's targeting in the city includes pursuing cultural institutions with income and property taxes (Arnona) and monitoring their activities in exhausting and exaggerated ways to hinder cultural work. This includes requesting information and images from previous years, threats of closure, and a complete ban on anything indicating official Palestinian government support for Jerusalem institutions.

Jerusalem institutions also faced attempts to dismantle them and render them unable to continue, combating cultural activities and blocking funds for these associations. This includes blocking the Holy Heritage Youth Forum Association funds and closing bank accounts, as was the case with the Hakawati Theater. The occupation authorities work to keep these associations inactive and completely halt their activities through suffocating administrative and legal methods. In contrast, Israeli associations in the city do not face any of these taxes and restrictions.

In the same context, the educational system in Jerusalem faces attempts to alter the curriculum and strip it of national and Arab concepts to erase Arab culture and establish a Jewish-Israeli educational environment through modifying the curriculum and placing obstacles for Palestinian students to enter Hebrew universities, thus undermining Arab education in general.

The report issued by the ministry stated that while the brutal war on Gaza continues, it is confirmed that museums and archaeological sites are subjected to the destruction of their contents. The ministry expressed concerns that archaeological sites, antiquities, and ancient artifacts might be stolen by occupation soldiers or some antiquities thieves who may accompany the army in its aggressive

operations. The ministry called on UNESCO and the Red Cross to establish an international committee to investigate these artifacts, archaeological sites, and museums. It emphasized that tampering with Palestinian antiquities and cultural properties in Palestine is a violation of an essential part of human memory. Therefore, the international community must take real responsibility to protect this memory.