

**UNESCO-Iraq office
Amman – Jordan**

**Restoration of Al-Askari Shrine Samarra City
Phase I**



1. Background:

Following the bombing on Wednesday, 22 February 2006, of the Holy Shiite Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra city in Iraq, and the public statement of the UNESCO Director General reiterating the readiness of the organization to assist the Government of Iraq in taking appropriate measures to protect and conserve the spiritual and cultural heritage of important sites, like Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra, UNESCO-Iraq Office undertook a range of activities in order to prepare for Phase I of the project which consists of urgent preventive works to protect the building and prepare the required drawings for the restoration project. In spite of the second bombing which took place on Wednesday, 13 June 2007, and the political context UNESCO put in place all mechanism and undertook all preparative activities to start the project.

The aim of the project is not only to restore a damaged historical and religious site but to mainly calm down the spiral of violence which killed thousands of Iraqi people and led the country to an almost full-fledged civil war as well as to contribute to the Iraqi reconciliation process.



The Shrine after the bombing

2. Funding

On April 3rd, 2006, the European Commission allocated \$8,000,000.00 for the project. It was decided that \$5,400,000.00 will be allocated for the Samarra Shrine project (UNESCO) and \$2,600,000.00 for the rehabilitation of religious sites and sub-projects (UNDP).

In addition to the UNDG trust fund (EC contribution) which contributed \$5,400,000.00 to Phase I of the project, the Iraqi Government participated with \$3,000,000.00 to the funding of the project. The related Memorandum of Understanding between UNESCO and the Iraqi Government was signed on June 12th, 2007.

3. Objectives

To ensure the safety and preservation of the Al-Askari Shrine site in order to prepare for its restoration:

- Carry out necessary studies for Al-Askari to protect, clean, classify and store materials and to reinforce the structure of the building;
- Collect data, carry out laboratory tests and prepare the final project according to the "International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Historic Monuments and Sites".

4. Achievements

4.1. **Mobilization activity** (building site installations) started in January 2008. The company contracted by the Iraqi Government failed to implement this activity. In order to house experts on mission in Samara from February 2008, UNESCO committed itself to implement this activity. About 40 workers from Samara population were appointed to undertake this activity.



Caravans installed on the side



Caravans furnished for experts

4.2. From February 2008, eight UNESCO experts did four missions to Samara (the last one in April 2008) to implement the following field activities

4.2.1. Protection of ornamental elements



Protection of the ornamental elements scattered on the site

4.2.2. The Classifying, originating and storing the discovered architectural elements and the materials scattered on the site in a temporary warehouse;



Classification of materials scattered on the site

4.2.3. Cleaning the site;

About 150 workers among them 75 from samara city participated to the evacuation of rubles from inside the Shrine.



The site cleaned

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The Inside the Shrine cleaned

5. Conclusion

The preparatory works (mobilization, cleaning, classification, etc.) will be completed by the end of May 2008. They will be followed by the survey of the site and the Shrine and the assessment studies (regarding soil, structure, materials, etc.) of the Shrine.

UNESCO still do believe that the implementation of the projects shall contribute to the reconciliation process in Iraq and are undertaking all necessary actions and activities to initiate them in spite of the volatile security which improved dramatically during the last three months.