



## UNESCO and Italy will rehabilitate Beirut's iconic train station

**Beirut, 24 July 2023** - As part of UNESCO flagship initiative LiBeirut, UNESCO and Italy signed today an agreement to finance the restoration and rehabilitation of the industrial heritage assets of the Beirut Mar Mikhael Train Station, mobilizing €2,000,000. The Mar Mikhael Train Station, which dates from 1894 and was abandoned during the Civil War, was impacted by the port blasts on 4 August 2020.

The announcement was made during a signing ceremony held by UNESCO, the Italian Embassy in Beirut and AICS, at the Mar Mikhael Train Station, in the presence of Sarkis Khoury Director General of Antiquities representing HE the Minister of Culture, Judge Mohammad Wissam Mourtada, Ziad Nasr Head of the Railway and Public Transport Authority representing HE the Minister of Transportation, Ali Hamie, and Taina Christiansen, Head of the UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme.

This project is part of a comprehensive intervention funded by Italy to preserve the industrial heritage of Mar Mikhael old train station and to open the space to the public. The first component of the Italian funded intervention is to be implemented by UN HABITAT and aims at creating a green public space in the train station area to the benefit of the people of Beirut. With the second component, Italy's grant will allow UNESCO to preserve the initial function of the site and its cultural value and authenticity, while creating a platform for social connection, cultural experience, and artistic creativity. This is expected to foster social and cultural connection by providing an open space for artists to work and market their products. The initiative is realized in close collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and in agreement with the Railway and Public Transport Authority of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport.

“With this project, Italy strengthens its engagement in the field of urban heritage preservation” – stressed the Ambassador of Italy in Lebanon, H.E. Nicoletta Bombardiere. “After the restoration of the Sursock Museum, the requalification of the Mar Mikhail Train Station is another step towards healing the socio-economic and cultural fabric of Beirut damaged by the Port blast. Protecting and promoting cultural heritage can be a driver for sustainable development, while also reinforcing the identity of a nation. This is why our partnership with Lebanon is a continuum, which includes other milestone projects such as the National Museum of Beirut and the Jupiter Temple in Baalbeck. The partnership with UNESCO plays an important role in this strategy”.

“Through the LiBeirut initiative, UNESCO places heritage at the heart of the international efforts. In the field of cultural heritage safeguarding, UNESCO is proud of this strategic partnership with Italy, which is the most prominent donor of the LiBeirut heritage component. This initiative is a



testament to our joint commitment to enhance Beirut livability and to strategically contribute to its revival. As an open space to the public, the project will support social and cultural participation for all people, with special attention to the most vulnerable at times of severe socioeconomic challenges in the country”, said the Director of the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office in Beirut, Costanza Farina.

The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) Beirut Director, Alessandra Piermattei highlighted that “the Italian Cooperation is supporting the rehabilitation of 10,000 m2 of the Mar Mikhael Train Station through two separated but interconnected projects implemented by two UN agencies, UNESCO and UN HABITAT. The signature of the agreement with UNESCO to restore the industrial heritage remains in the area and the UN HABITAT project working on the green public space will complement each other. The initiative will lead to improve the life and well-being of Beirut's citizens and reactivate the economic and social development of the area.”

Leveraging UNESCO specialized expertise in cultural heritage conservation, six heritage buildings from different historic periods will be rehabilitated. The shapes and structures will be carefully repaired and scientifically restored according to international standards and good practices, utilizing original materials and building techniques that will preserve the site attributes and authenticity.

Railways bare values that make them one of the most important elements of industrial heritage, while train stations are being reimagined today to create dynamic, multifunctional spaces where people can do more than set out or arrive on a journey. The Mar Mikhael Train Station, a unique industrial heritage site in the heart of Beirut, holds a huge potential in becoming a space where citizens can enjoy social and cultural exchanges. In addition to the degradation suffered due to abandonment, the heritage assets of this iconic place located at the proximity of the Port of Beirut, were severely damaged by the devastating 4 August 2020 blasts.

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*LiBeirut is an international flagship initiative launched from Beirut by the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, in the aftermath of the explosions, on August 27, 2020 to support the rehabilitation of schools, historic heritage buildings, museums, galleries and the creative industries, all heavily impacted by the deadly explosions. Through this initiative, UNESCO has also completed the rehabilitation of 280 educational institutions.*