

Press Release

The Hague, 27 December 2004

Prince Claus Fund for
Culture and Development

Cultural Emergency Response offers relief in Kingston, Jamaica and in Nablus, on the Palestinian West Bank

Cultural Emergency Response is facilitating the reopening of the National Gallery of Jamaica in Kingston that suffered considerable water damage in the wake of Hurricane Ivan. 15,660 euro will go towards replacing and repairing carpeting and parquet flooring. Work has begun and the National Gallery was able to welcome the first visitors to the opening of the local art biennial on 12 December 2004.

Cultural Emergency Response contributed a donation of 1,200 euro for the repair of the roof of the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Demethros in Nablus that covers an unusual wooden ceiling. In May of this year, the roof was damaged as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Cultural Emergency Response offers worldwide emergency assistance in the event of damage to, or destruction of, cultural property arising from man-made or natural disasters. With its work, CER aims to focus attention on the value of cultural property and underline the seriousness of cultural emergencies. CER does not offer a total solution but strives to achieve that through collaborating with others.

Kingston, National Gallery of Jamaica

On the night of 10-11 September 2004, Jamaica was struck by Hurricane Ivan. The National Gallery, the only museum of art on the island, situated in the Kingston Waterfront district, suffered extensive water damage. Fortunately, the collections could be moved to a safe place in time. But the floors were severely damaged and the high levels of humidity meant that the collections were in danger of mould.

The Gallery has a collection of more than 2,000 items ranging from artworks to historical and scientific objects. The permanent presentation exhibits Jamaican art from pre-Columbian times to the present day. The Gallery also organises temporary exhibitions including retrospectives of artists and thematic exhibitions, and hosts exhibitions of other museums, primarily from Latin America, North America and Europe. The visitors are predominantly Jamaican. The exhibitions and library are visited by many school-children and students. Unfortunately, most tourists and foreign visitors don't dare to venture to downtown Kingston.

Until 12 March, the Gallery is presenting the local biennial of contemporary art – a much sought-after opportunity for well-known and promising Jamaican artists to exhibit their work. The Gallery expected the biennial to attract a good number of visitors. Thanks to the rapid start made on the repair work, the biennial was able to open on 12 December as planned.

The repairs are being carried out by the National Gallery and local companies. The National Gallery hopes that CER's support will also make Jamaicans more aware of the cultural and social value of the Gallery.

The Prince Claus Fund is a platform for intercultural exchange. Working with individuals and organisations that are mainly located in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Fund organises activities and publications on contemporary themes in the field of culture and development. The Prince Claus Awards form part of this policy.

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Nablus, Greek Orthodox Church

The Greek Orthodox church of Saint Demethros in Nablus was built in 1861. The roof of the relatively small church covers a painted wooden ceiling. This type of ceiling is typical of Nablus and is only one of seven such ceilings in the city. In May this year, it suffered limited damage. But if the roof wasn't repaired in time for the winter rains, the wooden ceiling beneath it would have been lost. The repair work was carried out just in time: soon after the work was completed, an estimated third of the region's annual rainfall fell in Nablus.

The repair work was carried out by architect and restorer Naseer Arafat, based in Nablus. The emergency relief provided by CER prevented damage to the ceiling. Now financing can be sought for the complete restoration of the church.



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Cultural Emergency Response

Conflicts and natural disasters don't just jeopardise human life, but threaten contemporary and historical cultural heritage. When cultural heritage is destroyed people suffer a fundamental loss, one that is often not sufficiently recognised. Through a timely response, CER hopes to focus attention on cultural emergencies and contribute to saving cultural heritage. CER aims to act as a 'trigger', and encourage others to become involved in further relief efforts.

Cultural Emergency Response was founded on 26 September 2003 by the Prince Claus Fund and the International Committee of the Blue Shield. Cultural Emergency Response has already provided cultural relief in Baghdad (Iraq), Bam (Iran) and Mestassa (Morocco): CER gave the library of the University of Baghdad a contribution of 25,000 euro to refurbish the reading room at the university site in Al-Waziriye. Following the collapse of Saddam's regime in April 2003 the library was looted and burned. Limited facilities have once more been available to the students since the autumn of 2004.

On 26 December 2003 the town of Bam in southern Iran was badly hit by an earthquake. The Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization has a documentation centre on the town's ancient citadel, built more than 2000 years ago. CER donated 25,000 euro to help towards restoring the archives; the study of documents also serves as a basis for restoration and rebuilding.

The earthquake that struck North Morocco on 24 February this year caused considerable damage to the Mestassa mosque. The building, which is also used as a community centre and school, dates from the Merinides era (1244 - 1465) and is a vernacular version of the architectural style of this Berber dynasty. The 25,000 euro donated by CER is being spent on reinforcing the mosque and on basic restoration; CER hopes to find other partners to help towards the complete restoration of the mosque.

For further information and visual material for the press, please contact:

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