

VIRTUAL NAKBA MUSEUM ANNUAL REPORT 2025

1. BOARD REPORT

1.1. General

Name of foundation: Virtual Nakba Museum
Established: 8 January 2025
Cultural ANBI status: since 8 January 2025
Registered office: Rotterdam
RSIN: 867464860
Chamber of Commerce registration: 96089849
Bank account: NL57 ABNA 0141 8074 23
Website: <https://VirtualNakbaMuseum.org>

The foundation's objective (Article 2 of the Deed of Incorporation):

- a) to optimally make visible, protect, and disseminate cultural heritage in virtual form, particularly when such heritage is vulnerable, with primary focus on the cultural heritage of Palestine;*
- b) to promote worldwide awareness of the aforementioned cultural heritage;*
- c) to carry out all further actions that are related to or conducive to the above in the broadest sense.*

1.2. Introduction

This is the first annual report of our foundation.

After due consideration, experience, and preparation, the foundation was established in early 2025. Out of commitment and with great enthusiasm. However, developments in 2024 already made it clear that the realization of the first phase of our plan – visualizing a number of small-scale physical Palestinian museums via a website – would encounter many obstacles.

This ultimately led to the decision, at the end of this first year, to change course.

In addition to maintaining our ambition to visualize these museums where possible, we will now primarily focus on a fully digitized visual museum.

1.3. Objective and implementation

The underlying idea was that if the remaining available heritage could be made visible in the broadest possible way within its own context, this would sufficiently fuel indignation about ethnic cleansing, thereby increasing the willingness to take action against it in one way or another. This does not exclude other ways of drawing attention to the existing injustice.

The idea of doing this through a physical museum was quickly rejected. Such a museum could only be visited on location, which conflicted with our desire to reach as many people as possible. Moreover, it did not feel appropriate to remove objects from their original environment, where they belong. Another argument was that providing (albeit virtual) access to the often emotionally developed small-scale museums (in halls, living rooms, and tents in refugee camps) would lead to greater engagement on the part of the “visitor.”

An online search was then conducted for such small-scale museums in Palestine and Lebanon. Through articles, photo reports, interviews, and social media, we were able to identify a number of them.

The next step was to find photographers on site who were able and willing to take the desired photographs. We were fortunate that the Franco-German photojournalist Philippe Pernot volunteered to assist. Our foundation only had to provide him with some additional equipment for his gear, after which he began his work.

Meanwhile, however, violence in the Middle East continued to escalate. As a result, our photographer became persona non grata in Palestine and was unable to keep the appointment in Bethlehem. In Lebanon, his appointments also fell through due to bombardments and/or because the museum owner had fled.

It is not only important, for the sake of insight, that various museums are made virtually visible. At least as important is that we as a foundation can present at least one concrete example of what we envision. Although one example is obviously insufficient to approach other museums with a request for cooperation or to encourage people to donate to our foundation, it was nevertheless essential. For this reason, no such attempts have yet been made.

This brought us to Bristol (United Kingdom), where we found the Palestine Museum & Cultural Centre willing to have their physical museum photographed at our expense and made available as a virtual museum – see <https://zien360.online/20250211-bristol-palestine-museum/>.

This museum is particularly interesting because it is not only a museum but also a cultural centre, and therefore a good example of how the desired awareness can be created.

The recordings were made by Martin Jan Hoekstra, director of Zien360°, who also made this material virtually accessible. He strongly supports the initiative of our foundation. He therefore charges a reduced fee for his work and does not charge travel time for making recordings – even abroad. To ensure the recordings were as successful as possible, our foundation purchased specialized photographic equipment.

In addition, we explored the possibility of reconstructing lost cultural-historical buildings in 3D based on old photographs and film footage. Increasingly, specialized software for this purpose is entering the market, and AI is also becoming “smarter.” The preliminary conclusion is that it is wise to wait a little longer for technological developments, in order to avoid achieving something with cumbersome solutions that could be realized much more easily a few months later.

In support of our objectives, the board attended several events. On 6 February we visited the photography exhibition of Dutch photographer with Palestinian roots Sakir Khader at Foam Amsterdam. On 12 December, we attended the photography exhibition and lecture by Palestinian photojournalist and filmmaker Mohammed Zaanoun at PAX Utrecht. In both cases, the hope was to connect with suitable photographers in Palestine.

On 5 July we visited the exhibition *Saved Treasures from Gaza – 5,000 Years of History* at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris. While certainly interesting, it was unsuitable for creating a virtual presentation (even if the Institute had granted permission, as much of the material originated from various other museums).

A very different kind of exhibition was *Gaza Travel Agency*, which we visited on 25 October in Eindhoven. A large container had been placed there as part of Dutch Design Week. The interior of the container was a kind of enlarged version of the brochure *Bring Gaza Home*. This led to lively discussions on site with many visitors, and is therefore certainly something to incorporate into our virtual museum as well.

1.4. Organization

The board of the foundation in 2025 consisted of:

Benji de Levie – Chair
Nazha Rustom – Secretary
Simon Jonker – Treasurer.

The board met physically once, on 8 January, prior to visiting the notary. In addition, there were occasional one-on-one consultations, and digital coordination where necessary.

The board members received no remuneration for their work. Any expenses incurred (such as visiting exhibitions) were borne entirely by the board members themselves.

The foundation has no employees.

Susanne de Klerk volunteered her services and supports the treasurer. She waived the volunteer allowance.

1.5. Outlook

We can be brief: 2025 was not a success.

None of the intended physical small-scale museums in Palestine and Lebanon could be documented. As a result, it was also not useful to seek publicity or donors at this stage. The experiences of the past year have clearly pointed us toward a new direction: instead of photographing and virtualizing physical museums, we will now go fully digital. We will design a virtual *digital* museum with a large number of virtual exhibition spaces, which will be filled with photographs, videos, texts, and objects.

An advantage of this new approach is that the museum can be thematically structured from the outset, rather than creating coherence through an overall indexing system. It is expected that museums not primarily focused on Palestine but that do possess Palestinian material will be more willing to cooperate. All material will remain in the original museum and will be photographed there, if necessary in 3D. This advantage naturally also applies to cultural heritage from other countries.

Another advantage is that smaller thematic exhibitions can more easily be prepared, for example by the Palestinian community in the Netherlands, using their own objects as reminders of Palestine. And of course, we will continue to make every effort to document as many existing small-scale local museums abroad as possible.

In the coming year, we will for the time being focus less on non-Palestinian cultural heritage. First, we want to make a sufficiently complete overview of one region available. After that, the digital virtual infrastructure will have been tested and will be available for additional applications.

2. FINANCIAL REPORT

2.1. Financial policy

As long as little concrete material can be shown, fundraising has explicitly not been pursued. A successful fundraising campaign can only be conducted once, and the situation must be suitable for it.

To ensure that sufficient financial resources would nevertheless be available for several years, one donor was sought and found in advance: for a period of five years (starting in 2025), €10,200 per year is donated. Because most subscriptions (such as for domains) must be paid by credit card, the donor's private account was used for this purpose and the costs were offset against the donation. Since it was not possible to calculate this precisely in advance, and for safety reasons, an additional amount was deposited ahead of the new year to ensure sufficient liquidity.

The expenditure of these funds was as follows:

Amount	For the purpose of
€ 584.70	Incorporation costs – notary
€ 82.25	Incorporation costs – Chamber of Commerce
€ 205.70	Directors' liability insurance
€ 36.52	Business cards
€ 61.65	Domain and website costs – Your Hosting
€ 441.65	Domain and website costs – WordPress
€ 130.53	Research into approach for virtual documentation – MaXerport
€ 143.94	Temporary Arabic subscription – Systran

€ 643.83	Purchase of hardware for recordings by Philippe Pernot
€ 4,228.00	Purchase of hardware for recordings by Zien 360°
€ (60.00)	Cash-back promotion related to the purchase of hardware for Zien 360° – however, VNM is not subject to VAT
€ 178.02	Bank charges
€ 0.00	Accounting software – first year free
€ 4,108.23	Photography and editing of the virtual museum – Zien 360°
€ 10,785.02	TOTAL

From the financial overview above, it is also clear that in 2025 we were still “finding our way”:

To gain insight into the (im)possibilities of digital exhibition spaces, a subscription was taken out for several months with the American company Matterport. On the one hand because no overall indexing is available, but more importantly because there is uncertainty that “Matterport may suspend or terminate your use of the Service at any time at its sole discretion.” One cannot build a “secure” archive under such conditions. We therefore partnered with Zien 360°, which felt right from the beginning.

As a remnant of the earlier idea to establish a physical Nakba Museum (in the Netherlands), the Dutch domain VirtueelNakbaMuseum.nl was registered. We would have preferred to do this via WordPress, but that company does not register .nl domains. Therefore, as an intermediate step, the .nl domain was registered with YourHosting. When the physical museum was abandoned, the international “virtual” domain became the obvious choice. This was also registered with YourHosting, with a link to WordPress.

Because YourHosting debits invoices from a bank account and WordPress from a credit card, and because it is always complex for a foundation to open a bank account and obtain a Visa card, the contracts were privately concluded by one of the board members and the amounts were reimbursed by the foundation. In 2026, a credit card in the name of the foundation will be applied for and all contracts will be transferred to the foundation. As mentioned above, some rationalization of domains will also take place.

With great enthusiasm, we initially wanted to present the texts on our website not only in Dutch and English but also in Arabic. Common AI programs proved inadequate, so a subscription was taken out with the specialized provider Systran. It soon became apparent, however, that Arabic did not add sufficient value, and the subscription was cancelled. It is possible that in the future a decision will be made to develop the website in Arabic after all.

2.2. Profit & loss

Our foundation has the advantage that a donation of €10,200 per year will also be available for 2026 through 2029. This means that after deducting the (partly still reducible) fixed costs (such as bank charges, accounting, internet, and insurance), sufficient funds remain. This guarantees continuity, even if – due to circumstances as described above – implementation deviates from the Policy Plan 2024/2028.

Including various privately advanced payments and (due to liquidity constraints) an advance payment on the 2026 donation, leading to a favorable balance of € 5.172,16.

3. FOR THE PURPOSE OF CULTURAL ANBI STATUS

3.1. Project overview

Despite all efforts, only one project was realized in 2025: the virtual presentation of the physical Palestine Museum & Cultural Centre in Bristol (United Kingdom).

An agreement has already been made that, at the expense of our foundation, the new Natural History Museum in Bethlehem (Palestine), currently under construction, will be virtualized. For us, the section on the history of the Nakba is of particular importance, but the presentation of the surroundings of the building as an example of how green Palestine once was will also be documented.

The focus in 2026 will therefore be on the fully digital “construction” of the virtual museum and experimenting with a suitable and attractive design. Unlike merely photographing an existing museum, digital design requires the involvement of a larger number of contributors. Based on a preliminary thematic list, volunteers with expertise in various subjects will be approached to help. Subsequently, recordings will be made based on this concept.

Rotterdam, 5 February 2026.

Project overview:

documentation Natural History Museum Bethlehem (Palestine)
postponed to spring 2026

documentation Memories Museum Shatila/Beirut (Lebanon)
failed due to museum closure

documentation Palestine Museum & Cultural Centre Bristol (England)
realized summer 2025

initial construction virtual digital museum
prototype expected spring 2026

Overview of grants and funds:

currently one donor
from 2025 through 2029 €10,200 per year