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## Din I-Art Helwa Youth win Erasmus+ funding for Restoration Youth Exchange

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A group of youth volunteers with *Din I-Art Helwa*, in collaboration with partner NGOs Rempart and SPIHS (Society for Preservation of Israeli Heritage Sites) completed a two-week youth exchange at the Garden of Rest in Floriana. The initiative, organised by young architect Tara Cassar and led by History of Art student Alexandra Camilleri, was awarded a grant agreement through the Erasmus+ Programme. The project entitled *Crossing Borders for the Preservation of our Shared Heritage*, brought together six young volunteers from each participating country, Malta, France and Israel, who for the duration of the exchange carried out works of restoration at this prestigious garden that overlooks the Pieta Creek.

The Neo-Classical Garden of Rest built in 1806 during the British period, initially served as the burial site for Protestants residing in Malta at the time. It was only used until 1856 by which time the cemetery was full. In 1988 when taken under the guardianship of *Din I-Art Helwa*, the cemetery was in a very bad state. It had been directly hit by bombs in World War II and had been further damaged through several acts of vandalism over the years. More than 20,000 fragments of tombstones had to be put together. After 10 years the cemetery was finally restored to the unique state we find it in today.

Works carried out by the youth volunteers focused on the restoration of parts of bastion walls on top of which the garden rests. The superior slope was cleaned out of all weeds wedged in the joints between the stones. Damaged or open joints were then repainted with lime-based mortar. Volunteers were instructed by professional restorers Tony Mifsud and Josef Dalli, from the Restoration Directorate and James Licari, a conservator who for the past four years has supervised works for similar exchanges with *Din I-Art Helwa*.

Throughout the exchange the group was taken on various visits aimed at educating them on the traditional building techniques used in the construction of the forts as well as the historical significance of these monumental structures. The project was also aimed at increasing understanding of the merits of joint efforts and instilling belief in the creation of positive change. Through a hands-on learning approach the group was encouraged to take an active role in the development of their communities by contributing to the preservation of their shared cultural heritage. This also created room for participation in cultural open space and create links among volunteers from different backgrounds.

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