Filibuster successfully delays anti-Israel vote at UNESCO

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Israel succeeded in at least temporarily foiling yet another anti-Israeli resolution in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with the help of the US and a series of delaying tactics.

The resolution would have condemned the Jewish state’s handling of education in the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. Similar resolutions have been passed by the UN’s education agency since 2009.

According to a report in the Hebrew-language website Ynet, a discussion scheduled for 3 p.m. on Thursday on the resolution was not expected to last more than a few minutes and the Palestinians had the needed majority for it to pass.

But Israel, with the help of the US, used every possible means to create a filibuster, including demanding a vote by name from each of the 196 countries which are members of UNESCO.

By the time the vote eventually took place, several of the delegates had left and the Palestinians no longer had their majority. No final decision was taken, and further debate was scheduled for Friday.

When discussion of the resolution began, the Kenyan envoy, who was chairing the session, said the resolution could be approved without a vote or a discussion. But Israel and the US demanded to postpone discussion of the resolution to the next session, scheduled for 2019.

Neither Israel nor the United States has a right to vote, since they stopped paying their membership fees, but the two countries still have the right to request a postponement of the vote.

When delegates from Arab countries refused, Israel asked for a vote on each one of the 11 clauses in the resolution. Israel also demanded a vote by name from each country, which took several hours.

After that stage of the vote, Israel’s envoy Carmel Shama-Hacohen stood up to speak, at which point the Palestinian envoy asked the Kenyan chairman to rush the vote and not heed Israel’s demands.

Shama-Hacohen is “trying to take this plenum hostage. Don’t let him get away with this,” the Palestinian diplomat said. Despite the protest, the chair allowed Shama-Cohen to continue.

Shama-Hacohen said that even though the Palestinian proposals were bound to eventually pass, the filibuster was a message of protest.

“We have made it clear that the days are over when anti-Israel resolutions can be passed in five minutes. There will be a price tag for the obsession against Israel. The organization and world countries will need to devote dozens of hours to add discussions to the schedule and sit through long sessions,” he said.

“Maybe then they will start thinking whether it is worth the time invested in resolutions which are political, aimless, and have nothing to do with education, culture or science.”

In some cases, Shama-Hacohen said, such filibusters may even bring countries to not adopt resolutions. “What is certain is that no one will again treat these resolutions as obvious or natural,” he said.

Among what may be the first results of the filibuster, China, usually an automatic supporter of the Palestinians at the UN, abstained while Mexico, a usually pro-Palestinian country, voted in Israel’s favor. According to Ynet, Mexico voted against its usual inclination in gratitude of the assistance it was given by Israel following a recent earthquake.