Israel, U.S. slated to leave UNESCO today to protest anti-Israel bias

December 31, 2018

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The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/International/Israel-US-slated-to-leave-UNESCO-today-to-protest-anti-Israel-bias-575875>

Israel and the United States are slated to leave the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific organization today over its anti-Israel bias.

Israel’s Foreign Ministry is expected to make an announcement on the matter later today.

Israel has been a member state of UNESCO since 1949. In the last 17 years, the global cultural body has registered nine sites within the country on its World Heritage List.

But it’s pro-Palestinian stances has created increasing friction with both countries.

In 2011, both countries halted payment of their annual fees after UNESCO became the first UN body to recognize Palestine as a state in 2011. Israel now owes UNESCO $8.5 million.

Both countries lost voting rights in the organization in 2013 over their failure to pay dues, but maintained all other participation rights.

The situation intensified in 2016 after the Palestinian Authority and the Arab states pushed forward resolutions at the United Nations Executive Board that ignored Jewish ties to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, describing the most holy sites in Judaism solely by their Muslim names of al-Haram al-Sharif and the Buraq Plaza. They also passed texts disavowing Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem.

In addition in 2017, the [World Heritage Committee voted to inscribe Hebron’s Old Town and the Tomb of the Patriarchs to the state of Palestine](https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/UNESCO-votes-in-favor-of-inscribing-Hebron-sites-to-the-State-of-Palestine-499059). The inscription focused heavily on the city’s Muslim history after the year 1250, in spite of the city’s Biblical and Jewish roots.

Attempts by UNESCO director-general Audrey Azoulay to remedy the situation since she took office in November 2017 has done little to sway Israel or the US to remain in UNESCO.

Last year, she was able to broker a comprise on the Jerusalem resolution, which had been approved twice a year in its Executive Board meetings.

In 2018, Executive Board passed a benign text that included no controversial elements.

But an annex was attached to the document with more controversial statements seen either as pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli included.

The annex, for example, affirmed that Jerusalem was holy to all three religions, but also [disavowed Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem and claimed that Hebron and Rachel’s Tomb were an integral part of Palestine](https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/UNESCO-Hebron-Bethlehem-integral-part-of-Occupied-Palestine-569058).

Already in October, however, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon was fairly blunt in starting that the annex compromise did not go far enough, because it still allowed for problematic language to move forward.

In June of this year UNESCO launched its first policy guide for educators on antisemitism. It also held a forum on antisemitism on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly’s opening session in New York.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, boycotted the session, which was attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and other heads of state.

At the time Netanyahu said,“Since 2009, UNESCO has passed 71 resolutions condemning Israel and only two resolutions condemning all other countries combined. This is simply outrageous.

“The mark of antisemitism was once singling out the Jewish people for slander and condemnation. The mark of antisemitism today is singling out the Jewish state for slander and condemnation,” Netanyahu said.

“No matter what UNESCO says, the Western Wall is not occupied Palestinian territory, and the Cave of the Patriarchs – the burial site of Abraham and Sara, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah – is not a Palestinian Heritage Site.

“In [withdrawing from UNESCO in 2017](https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Protesting-anti-Israel-bias-US-plans-withdrawal-from-UNESCO-507271), Israel and the United States made a clear moral statement that UNESCO’s antisemitism will no longer be tolerated. If and when UNESCO ends its bias against Israel, stops denying history and starts standing up for the truth, Israel will be honored to rejoin. Until then, Israel will fight antisemitism at UNESCO and everywhere else," he said.