UNESCO Adopts Resolution Ignoring Jewish Ties to Temple Mount

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UNESCO’s Executive Board in Paris on Friday adopted a resolution whose language ignores Jewish ties to its holy religious site of the Temple Mount and the Western Wall area in Jerusalem’s Old City.

The broad-ranging resolution condemns Israeli actions in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip but focus in large part on Israeli actions with regard to the Temple Mount and Western Wall Plaza.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all consider the Temple Mount to be a holy site, but the UNESCO Resolution referred to the area solely as al-Aksa Mosque/al-Haram al Sharif, except for two references to the Western Wall Plaza that were put in parenthesis. The text also referred to the plaza area by the Western Wall as al-Buraq Plaza.

In October, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization backed away from reclassifying the Western Wall as solely a Muslim holy site, but is now using language that almost solely refers to it as such.

April’s resolution reaffirmed that the Mughrabi Ascent, which starts at the Western Wall Plaza, is an integral and inseparable part of al-Aksa Mosque/al-Haram al-Sharif.

The resolution calls on Israel to restore the status of the Temple Mount to what it was prior to September 2000 when the second intifada broke out. At that time, according to the resolution, the Jordan Wakf had full control of al-Aksa Mosque/ al-Haram al Sharif including maintenance and restoration work and regulating access.

The site currently is under the full authority, but not full control, of the Islamic Wakf. Only Muslims are allowed to pray at the Aksa complex, but Jews and members of other faiths are allowed to visit.

Israel controls the access to the site, and has persistently rejected all claims that the status quo at the site has been changed.

UNESCO called on Israel not to restrict Muslim worshipers from accessing the Aksa Mosque site and condemned the violence that occurred there in the fall, but focused solely on Israeli actions in those incidents and not the violence of the Muslim rioters.

It condemned Israeli plans to build a prayer space for Women of the Wall by Robinson’s Arch, although it did not mention the group by name.

The resolution also charged that Israel had placed “Jewish fake graves” in other Muslim cemeteries located on Wakf property east and south of the Aksa mosque.

Aside from its condemnations with regard to Jerusalem, the resolution deplored the “new cycle of violence, since October 2015, in the context of the constant aggressions by the Israeli settlers and other extremist groups against Palestinian residents including schoolchildren, and asks Israel, the Israeli authorities to prevent such aggressions.” It did not mention the 34 fatalities from Palestinian attacks.

UNESCO also said it regretted Israel’s failure to comply with its request to remove from its National Heritage list, the Cave of the Patriarch/Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and Rachel’s Tomb/Bilal bin Rabah mosque in Bethlehem.

The 58-member board approved resolution 19 with 33 votes in favor, six against and 17 abstentions. Ghana and Turkmenistan were absent all together.

Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States opposed the resolution outright, while France, Spain, Sweden, Russia and Slovenia were among those who supported it.

A second resolution that more globally condemned Israeli actions, passed with 45 votes in favor, one vote against – the United States – and 11 abstentions.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the move as another “absurd” UN resolution.

“UNESCO ignores the unique Jewish connection to the Temple Mount, the site of two temples for 1,000 years, and the place to which Jews prayed for thousands of years,” he said in a statement Saturday night. “ The UN is rewriting a basic part of human history and proving that there is no low to which it will not reach.”

Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid on Friday night distributed copies of the resolutions to the media and slammed the decision.

He penned a letter to the UNESCO director- general Irina Bokova in which he called the resolution a “disgraceful attempt to rewrite history and rewrite reality as part of a sustained political campaign against the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

“This resolution was an utterly irresponsible intervention in one of the most complex places in the Middle East. UNESCO prides itself on promoting tolerance, interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue, yet it passes resolutions which erase the Jewish people from the historical narrative,” Lapid said.

He warned that the UNESCO resolution feeds the type of incitement that fueled the violence that began around the time of the Jewish New Year.

“The decision by UNESCO feeds this incitement and so contributes to the wave of terrorism. It will lead directly to more attacks against innocent Israeli civilians and you cannot avoid responsibility for that,” Lapid said.

“This latest one-sided resolution is a stain on the United Nations,” he wrote, urging Bokova to publicly declare her opposition to it.

“You must not allow UNESCO to be hijacked as part of the campaign to delegitimize Israel and isolate the Jewish people,” he said.