New Palestinian Attempt at UNESCO to Claim Hebron and the Patriarch’s Tomb as a Palestinian Site

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<http://jcpa.org/article/new-palestinian-attempt-unesco-claim-hebron-patriarchs-tomb-palestinian-site/>

* From recent media reports, it is evident that the Palestinian campaign to delegitimize Israel, falsely adjust history, and abuse the international community by manipulating a respected international specialized agency is proceeding at an enhanced pace. The campaign has turned UNESCO into a partisan political tool beyond, exceeding, and ultra vires its own constitutional principles. This despite recent indications since the Abbas-Trump meetings of a relaxation on initiatives in the international community against Israel.
* The latest example of this is the Palestinians’ request to register the Old City of Hebron – including its Tomb of the Patriarchs – to the “State of Palestine” at the upcoming meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, scheduled to take place from July 2 to 12, 2017, in Krakow, Poland.[1](http://jcpa.org/article/new-palestinian-attempt-unesco-claim-hebron-patriarchs-tomb-palestinian-site/" \l "_edn1) Both these sites are being fast-tracked and listed for debate as “endangered” World Heritage Sites on the agenda for the upcoming meeting.
* This attempt by the Palestinian leadership runs counter to any claim by Palestinian representatives, as well as by leaders in the international community, that the Palestinians come with clean hands to the international community and genuinely seek a peaceful solution with Israel.
* This exercise is utterly flawed in light of the following considerations:
  + It denies and misrepresents history by attempting to nullify any Jewish connection to Hebron and the Tomb of Abraham, and by falsely determining that they are Palestinian sites.
  + It constitutes a willful and cynical abuse of the bona fides of the international community and the professional stature of UNESCO as the major educational and cultural organization.
  + It runs contrary to the Palestinian commitments in the Oslo Accords, including the 1997 Hebron Protocol,[3](http://jcpa.org/article/new-palestinian-attempt-unesco-claim-hebron-patriarchs-tomb-palestinian-site/" \l "_edn3) to respect the agreed-upon arrangements for the joint governance of Hebron and shared worshipping in the Cave of the Patriarchs.

### Jewish Historical Roots of Hebron

The town of Hebron, situated in the biblical region of Judea, is the site of the oldest Jewish community in the world, and since Bible times has been considered the second holiest city in Judaism after Jerusalem. The Canaanite city was founded around 1720 BCE, and the ancient Canaanite and Israelite city was situated at Tel Romeida.

The most famous historic site in Hebron is the Cave of the Patriarchs (Me’arat Hamachpela) which, as described in the Book of Genesis Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hittite for over 400 silver shekels to bury his wife, Sarah. Subsequently, the cave became a family tomb in which Abraham himself, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and Leah were also buried. For this reason, Hebron is also referred to as the “City of the Patriarchs” and regarded as one of Judaism’s holiest cities. King David was anointed in Hebron, where he reigned for seven years.

As the burial place of Abraham (Ibrahim), Hebron (Al-Khalil in Arabic) is also revered by Muslims.

Perhaps the first and most fundamental example of, and precedent for Jewish land-purchase in the Holy Land and specifically in the town of Hebron, was indeed that land purchase carried out four thousand years ago by Abraham.

Rather than merely relying on the promise given by God as described in the Book of Genesis, according to which “…to you I will give this land,” Abraham nevertheless insisted on actually purchasing the *Machpela* meadow and cave through a publicly witnessed, legal transaction in the presence of all residents of the town.

The presence and residence in the city of Hebron by Jews, including ownership of property, has been recorded throughout the various periods of the city’s history including the Canaanite, Israelite, Islamic, Crusader, Kurdish Ayyubid and Mamluk period, Ottoman, and British periods. Eviction and massacres of Jews and the confiscation of their property was prevalent throughout these periods.

More recently, during the [1929 Hebron massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1929_Hebron_massacre), Arab rioters slaughtered some 67 Jewish men, women and children and wounded 60, and ransacked Jewish homes and synagogues; 435 Jews survived. Two years later, 35 families moved back into the ruins of the Jewish quarter, but on the eve of the [Palestinian Arab national revolt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1936-1939_Arab_revolt_in_Palestine) (April 23, 1936) the British Government moved the Jewish community out of Hebron as a precautionary measure to secure its safety. During the post-1948 Jordanian rule, all Jewish presence was removed.

Throughout the world, for generations, the holiness of Hebron as a major Jewish historic and religious center has remained steadfast. Properties that had been purchased by Jews in those earlier periods and later confiscated by the various ruling authorities are now gradually being restored to their descendants, including through re-acquisition and purchase from their present occupants. To this end, Jews throughout the world seek to purchase property in the city and restore its honor and its significance to the Jewish world as a major Jewish center. Most Jewish-owned properties are in fact registered in the Jordanian land register as “property abandoned by the Zionist enemy.” This register still exists as proof of Jewish ownership.

### Abuse of UNESCO and the International Community

According to the founding Constitution of UNESCO adopted in 1945 (as amended from time to time):

The purpose of the organization is to contribute to peace and security through promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.

In its constitutional principles, the organization views ignorance, suspicion, and mistrust to be the main causes of prejudice, inequality, and war.

The UNESCO Constitution heralds the wide diffusion of culture and the education of humanity for justice, liberty, and peace as indispensable to the dignity of man, constituting a “sacred duty which all the nations must fulfill in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern.”

“Intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind,” and “unrestricted pursuit of objective truth” are declared to be the basic components of peace.

Sadly, since the Palestinian leadership has subverted what was intended to be a professional and educational organization, UNESCO can no longer be regarded as an objective, universal, and professional specialized agency. As such, its special character as the educational and cultural organ of the UN has been gravely and irreparably polluted and prejudiced.

For this reason, one might expect that serious and responsible states disassociate from and reject such resolutions and review their positions regarding continued membership of UNESCO.

### Violation of Agreements with Israel

The Palestinian attempt to mislead the international community regarding the Jewish history and heritage in the town of Hebron and the Cave of the Patriarchs runs contrary to the PLO commitment to foster positive and supportive public atmosphere, mutual trust, and good faith in the relations between the two peoples set out in Article XVI of the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (“Oslo II”).

Article VII of the Protocol annexed to the agreement concerning redeployment and security arrangements, together with the 1997 Hebron Protocol, agreed-upon pursuant to it, sets down agreed guidelines for Hebron within the context of Israel’s redeployment of forces and joint governance of the holy places.

### Conclusion

It is high time that the international community wakes up to the blatant abuse and manipulation of its specialized international bodies by the Palestinian leadership. The damage caused by such irresponsible and abusive Palestinian political exercises – all with the aim of delegitimizing Israel and nullifying Jewish history and heritage – will be irreparable.