Jewish Human Rights Group Warns of Potential UNESCO ‘Catastrophe’ as Saudi Arabia, Iran Join Qatar as Frontrunners for Leading Posts

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#### [By Ben Cohen](https://www.algemeiner.com/author/ben-cohen-alg)

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Israel could face a trio of hostile nations leading UNESCO — the UN’s cultural agency — following elections to be held at the group’s 39th General Conference in Paris this coming November, according to an official with a Jewish human rights organization.

As [The Algemeiner reported last week](https://www.algemeiner.com/2017/04/28/leading-jewish-group-warns-of-negative-ramifications-for-israel-if-qatari-diplomat-becomes-next-unesco-chief/), the US-based Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) — which has observer status at UNESCO — has already expressed concern that the former Qatari culture minister Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari could become UNESCO’s next director-general (replacing Bulgaria’s Irina Bokova).

The gravity of that potential outcome for Israel, the SWC’s Dr. Shimon Samuels said, has been exacerbated by reports that Saudi Arabia and Iran are front-runners to be elected as the next chairs of the UNESCO General Conference and Executive Board, respectively, in November.

Along with the Director-General and the Secretariat, the General Conference and the Executive Board make up the three constitutional organs of UNESCO. Should the SWC’s fears about the November elections pan out, all three of UNESCO’s constitutional organs will be controlled by countries — Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran — that have no diplomatic relations with Israel and which have regularly backed anti-Israel UNESCO resolutions.

“Imagine if the Iranian ambassador, in his role as the chair of the Executive Board, refuses to meet with the Israeli ambassador,” Samuels told The Algemeiner. “That would be a catastrophe.”

Samuels spoke with The Algemeiner the same day UNESCO, at a meeting in Paris, [voted by a 22-10 margin](https://www.algemeiner.com/2017/05/02/unesco-condemnation-of-israel-passes-amid-unprecedented-opposition-for-african-latin-american-and-european-nations/) (with 23 abstentions and three absences) to approve a resolution that condemned what it called Israel’s “illegal” presence in Jerusalem.

Samuels, who attended the debate, highlighted the role Israeli Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama-HaCohen played in pushing back against the resolution. While wrapped in an Israeli flag, Samuels said, Shama-HaCohen lauded Israel’s various Nobel Prize winners, telling delegates, “Here we are and here we’ll stay.”

HaCohen reportedly described the resolution’s passage as a “lose, lose”  for all sides and offered Israel’s help to secure a “win, win.”

Samuels said, “The next step in this exponential ID theft of the Jewish and Christian narratives will take place at the July UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Krakow, Poland, where its 21 member states will vote yet again on Jerusalem and possibly — on the Palestinian wish list — Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls.”