Trump administration correctly removes US from biased UNESCO

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The United States is a leader on the world stage because of our defense and promotion of liberty and freedom. To advance those causes around the globe, we have and continue to participate in a wide array of international organizations and partnerships.

Last week, the Trump administration took the laudable step of removing the United States from UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. For too long and on too many occasions, UNESCO demonstrated an anti-Israel agenda and acted contrary to its stated mission.

Earlier this year, UNESCO designated the Old City of Hebron and the Tomb of the Patriarchs – one of the holiest sites for the Jewish people – as part of the Palestinian territory. The patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah – are all buried at the site.

The action by UNESCO on Hebron is yet another anti-Israel measure that denies facts and continues its abhorrent pattern of behavior. Months before, UNESCO approved a resolution that rejected Israel’s legal or historical claims to the city of Jerusalem.

This troubling pattern of obvious anti-Israel agenda is why I offered an amendment this past July during the Appropriations Committee markup of the Fiscal Year 2018 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill condemning UNESCO’s decision on Hebron and the Tomb of the Patriarchs. The amendment passed unanimously.

Time and again, the State Department, Israel and others have voiced their concerns about UNESCO’s actions and urged restraint and reform. In 2011, through legislation passed by Congress, the United States stopped funding UNESCO due to its recognition of Palestine as a sovereign state and their admittance as a member-state. Still, UNESCO’s pattern of abuse continued, leaving the Trump administration with no option but to remove the United States from the organization, a move I wholeheartedly support. Actions that refute Jewish connections to historical sites only move us further away from peaceful and sustainable solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The United States has a number of options when it comes to advancing our international goals of promoting peace and liberty. Those options include removing ourselves from organizations that serve an agenda that negates history in an effort to undermine Israel, our closest ally in the Middle East.

America must send a clear and unmistakable message to the Middle East and beyond that anyone with an anti-Israel and anti-Semitic agenda will not go unchallenged. I am hopeful that the decision to step away from UNESCO will be a wakeup call to nations and international organizations, and that we can find new partnerships that continue to advance and strengthen the goals we all share for a stable and prosperous world.