# UNESCO Adopts Another Resolution Ignoring Jewish Link to Temple Mount

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An important panel at the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) on Wednesday morning approved a controversial resolution that ignores Jewish and Christian ties to the Temple Mount. The decision came a week after a similar resolution was approved by the body and elicited angry responses from Israel, several world leaders and even the body’s own director-general.

Convening at its annual meeting in Paris, UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee adopted Draft Resolution 40COM 7A.13, entitled “Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls,” by a large majority, with 10 countries voting in favor, eight abstaining and two opposing the text. Eight “yes” votes were needed for the resolution to pass.

Jamaica was absent and did not participate in the vote.

This year’s member countries of the committee made things particularly difficult for Israeli diplomats battling the resolution. Germany, Colombia and Japan, all sympathetic nations to Israel, are no longer involved, and in their place are Tunisia, Kuwait, Lebanon and Indonesia, bringing to nine the total number of Muslim countries. Those nine and Vietnam were all assumed to have voted for the resolution. Poland, Finland, Croatia, Portugal, the four European countries, had indicated they would abstain.

The 21 nations with voting rights on the World Heritage Committee were: Finland, Poland, Portugal, Croatia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Tunisia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Peru, Cuba, Jamaica, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Angola and Tanzania.

The resolution, which accuses Israel of various violations, echoed last week’s decision in referring to the Temple Mount compound solely by its Muslim names, “Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif,” and defined it only as “a Muslim holy site of worship.” As the site of the two Biblical temples, the mount is the holiest place in Judaism. But unlike last week’s resolution, the draft did not mention the importance of Jerusalem’s Old City for “the three monotheistic religions.”

“This is yet another absurd resolution against the State of Israel, the Jewish people and historical truth,” Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama-Hacohen, said after the vote.

The fate of the resolution would be no different from United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism, he predicted, noting that that resolution was overturned 16 years after its adoption in 1975. Recalling that Israel’s ambassador to the UN at the time, Chaim Herzog, tore apart a copy of that resolution, he said that UNESCO’s resolution on Jerusalem belonged in the garbage bin of history.

“I have no intention of doing this today — not because of your dignity, or the dignity of this organization, but because it is not even worthy of the energy needed for tearing it apart,” the Israeli envoy said, before proceeding to lift up a black dustbin with the word “History” on it and place a copy of the text inside.

Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, also condemned the decision.

“The absurdity continues, and UNESCO has adopted yet another ridiculous decision that is completely disconnected from reality,” he said in a statement. “UNESCO embarrassed itself by marching to the tune of the Palestinian pipers. All attempts to deny our heritage, distort history and disconnect the Jewish people from our capital and our homeland, are doomed to fail.”

At the opening of Wednesday’s session, the chairperson of the World Heritage Committee, Turkish diplomat Lale Ülker, proposed that the resolution be adopted “by consensus,” which would have given the appearance of a unanimous decision. A majority of member states supported her proposal, but Tanzania and Croatia asked for a secret ballot. Despite vociferous opposition by Lebanon, Tunisia, Cuba and other states that pushed for “consensus,” the committee’s legal adviser eventually ruled that a secret ballot would be held on the resolution, paving the way for the two “no” votes and the eight abstentions.

Despite frantic Israeli efforts to convince some of the committee’s member states to oppose the resolution, its eventual adoption did not come as a surprise to anyone in Jerusalem. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said late Tuesday night that UNESCO’s second vote on the matter within a few days showed the organization remains a “theater of the absurd.” He said that while “extremist Muslim forces are destroying mosques and churches, Israel is the only country in the region that protects them and allows freedom of worship.”

Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama-Hacohen watches on as the World Heritage Committee votes on a resolution ignoring Jewish and Christian ties to Jerusalem’s Old City in Paris, October 26, 2016 (screen shot UNESCO website)

According to Shama-Hacohen, Netanyahu instructed him to work to convince countries likely to abstain to go further and cast a vote against the resolution, arguing that an abstention would be akin to support. He described the resolution as “diplomatic jihad” against the Jewish people, Judaism and Christianity.

“Israel respects Muslim and other faiths and their presence in our holiest of places, and it is tragic that the other side doesn’t have a leadership that will do the same, but rather one that is engaged only in doing the exact opposite,” Shama-Hacohen said Tuesday during a meeting with UNESCO’s director-general, Irina Bokova. “This is no longer an Israeli-Palestinian struggle, but an Arab struggle against the entire Jewish world. It is clear that Israel and the Jewish people will survive this, yet it remains unclear whether UNESCO will.”

Shama-Hacohen and the heads of two Israeli advocacy groups, StandWithUs and the International Legal Forum, handed Bokova a petition signed by more than 77,000 Jews and Christians calling on UNESCO “to recognize the irrefutable deep historic, cultural and religious connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel.”

UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee voting on a resolution ignoring Jewish and Christian ties to Jerusalem’s Old City in Paris, October 26, 2016 (screen shot UNESCO website)

The earlier resolution, which was approved October 13 at the UNESCO committee stage with 24 “yes” votes, six “no” votes and 26 abstentions, and then formally confirmed by UNESCO’s executive on October 18, sparked vociferous condemnation in Israel, as well as from UNESCO’s own director, Irina Bokova, and several foreign leaders.

Last week’s text referred to Israel as “the occupying power” at the holy sites. The resolution adopted Wednesday — sponsored by Kuwait, Lebanon and Tunisia — did not, which Israel considers a minor victory. In another significant divergence from the October 13 text, the new version did not put quotation marks around the designation “Western Wall,” a punctuation seen in Israel as bolstering the original resolution’s disdain for Judaism’s connection to its holiest site.

The adoption of the resolution creates an absurd situation whereby the archaeological digs on and around the site of the Temple Mount, which have unearthed copious evidence of a Jewish connection to the site, may now be designated as destruction of the Muslim site.