In fresh snub, UAE gives medals to all UNESCO members but Israel

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The United Arab Emirates snubbed Israel again on Monday, when its diplomats handed out gifts to all delegations at the UN cultural agency except Israel.

The incident came on the heels of UAE’s refusal last week to allow Israeli athletes to display the Israeli flag and play the national anthem at a judo tournament in Abu Dhabi. An Emirati judoka also refused to shake hands after losing to his Israeli competitor, although the country’s top judo official later [apologized to his Israeli counterpart](https://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-apologizes-to-israel-for-judo-handshake-snub/) for the snub.

At Monday’s opening of UNESCO’s 39th General Conference in Paris, the Emirati delegation placed a box containing a silver medal on the desk of each foreign delegation in honor of the UAE having sponsored the renovation of the conference hall. The medals bear a portrait of Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the deputy ruler of Dubai and finance minister of the UAE, who sponsored the renovations.

No box, however, was placed on the desk of Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama-Hacohen.

“The State of Israel has no need for gifts, but this ugly and uncivilized step, here in the world’s organization for culture and education, which follows the outrageous treatment of our judokas during the tournament in the UAE’s capital, shows how much hatred, incitement and dark mentality surround these people,” Shama-Hacohen said.

Money can buy many things, but not reason and good manners, the Israeli diplomat added, quoting a Jewish proverb that says “Those who hate presents will live.”

Shama-Hacohen said he plans to protest the UAE’s move with UNESCO’s outgoing director Irina Bokova.

“There’s no room for boycotts, discrimination and politics in sport,” said Shama-Hacohen.

He also said incoming UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay will “hear from me at the first opportunity.”

Last week, Israeli judokas won five medals — one gold and four bronze — at the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam. Organizers refused to let the athletes display the Israeli flag and to play “Hatikva.” Instead, the Israeli judoka were officially competing under the International Judo Federation’s banner.

In addition to the ban on Israeli national symbols, the UAE’s Rashad Almashjari refused to shake hands after losing to Israeli Tohar Butbul in the first round of the men’s lightweight (66-73 kg) category.

Mohammad Bin Thaloub Al-Darei, president of the UAE’s Judo Federation, and Aref Al-Awani, another senior Emirates sports official, later apologized to Israeli Judo Association head Moshe Ponte over Almashjari’s refusal to shake hands with Butbul, according to a statement from the International Judo Federation.

Darei and Awani “apologized because of the UAE athletes not shaking hands with the Israel athletes and also congratulated the Israel team for their success here,” IJF president Marius Vizer said. He called the move a “gesture of courage.”