Ex-Qatari Minister, Who Wrote Preface to Antisemitic Book, Among Leading Candidates in Election Contest for New UNESCO Chief

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A Qatari official with a questionable record on antisemitism is among the leading candidates standing for election this week for the post of the next director-general of UNESCO — the UN’s Paris-based educational, scientific and cultural organization.

Seven candidates are in the running for the post, with voting continuing through this week until one of the contenders wins a majority. Qatar’s candidate for the post is its former culture minister, Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari.

Dr. Shimon Samuels — director of international relations for the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) — told The Algemeiner on Monday that the Jewish human rights organization had been tracking Al-Kawari’s antisemitic statements and activities for several years. Despite protests from the SWC and other Jewish organizations, Al-Kawari permitted the prominent display of violently antisemitic literature at the Doha Annual Book Fairs in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Antisemitic texts have also been display on Qatar’s stand at the world-famous book fair in Frankfurt.

Most glaringly, an antisemitic book published in 2013 by Qatar’s Ministry of Culture — titled Jerusalem in the Eyes of the Poets — contains a preface written by Al-Kawari himself.

The book includes the statement, “The Jews control the media, newspapers, publishing houses in the United States and the West” — a calumny, Samuels said, reminiscent of the antisemitic invective of Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Germany’s propaganda minister.

The same book quotes the late French Holocaust denier, Roger Garaudy, as an authority in terms of dismissing the historical connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. The book also opined, “Israel is responsible for the Lebanese Civil War; the first and second Gulf wars; the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan; the turmoil in Sudan and Egypt.”

Al-Kawari’s main rivals for the post are Qian Tang of China, who has served as UNESCO’s assistant director-general for education since 2010, and former Egyptian government minister Moushira Khattab. Khattab is being backed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab of Emirates, and Bahrain, all of whom are locked in a bitter diplomatic dispute with Qatar over Doha’s alignment with the Iranian regime and its support for terrorist groups such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Samuels said Qatar’s energetic lobbying for the post had involved financial incentives to other countries to win their support. “They’ve been handing out cash all over the place, throughout Africa especially,” Samuels charged.

UNESCO has been undergoing a cash crisis since the US [stopped funding](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-unesco-usa-funding/u-s-stops-unesco-funding-over-palestinian-vote-idUSTRE79U5ED20111031) the organization in 2011, following the entry of the “State of Palestine” as a member. [Early on](https://www.algemeiner.com/2017/04/28/leading-jewish-group-warns-of-negative-ramifications-for-israel-if-qatari-diplomat-becomes-next-unesco-chief/) in his campaign, Al-Kawari suggested that Qatar would be able to make up for the $400 million lost by UNESCO as a result of the American decision.

To date, Al-Kawari has refused to respond to concerns regarding his promotion of antisemitism. The former minister’s silence implied “at best indifference, at worst endorsement,” Samuels said.