**Long overdue winds of change at the UN?**

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http://www.aijac.org.au/news/article/long-overdue-winds-of-change-at-the-un

As Israel was celebrating its 69th birthday on Tuesday, the UNESCO Executive Board was at work [passing](http://www.timesofisrael.com/on-independence-day-unesco-okays-resolution-ignoring-jewish-links-to-jerusalem/) yet another anti-Israel resolution.

The [resolution](http://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-may-2017-unesco-resolution-on-occupied-palestine/) was submitted by Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Sudan, on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, and its text included the following controversially [statement](http://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-may-2017-unesco-resolution-on-occupied-palestine/):

"All legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the ‘basic law' on Jerusalem, are null and must be rescinded forthwith."

Anti-Israel UNESCO resolutions are nothing new, [previous](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/UNESCO-adopts-resolution-ignoring-Jewish-ties-to-Temple-Mount-451346) UNESCO motions have sought to undermine Israel's sovereignty over east Jerusalem including the Old City of Jerusalem, while attempting to reclassify the Jewish holy sites of the Western Wall and the Temple Mount solely by their Muslim names of the Buraq Wall and al-Haram al-Sharif.

However, despite the resolution passing, [some](http://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-may-2017-unesco-resolution-on-occupied-palestine/) are viewing it as a diplomatic win for Israel as only 38% of the voting countries supported the measure. Of the 58 Member Executive Board: 10 opposed it (United States, Italy, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Greece, Germany, Paraguay, Togo and Ukraine), 22 nations supported it including Russia, Iran, Sweden, South Africa, China, Brazil and Vietnam, 23 countries abstained including Estonia, France, Slovenia, Spain, India, Japan, Kenya and Uganda, and three were absent (Nepal, Serbia and Turkmenistan). The vote represents a significant change from last year, in which 33 nations approved a controversial anti-Israel text in April and 24 voting for it in October.

Leading up the vote, Israel was concerned a German-led effort in which 11 EU states met with the resolution's Arab sponsors to work on a common language might lead to EU support for the resolution, however, that initiative fell through, and Sweden was the only EU country to support the resolution. According to the[*Jerusalem Post*](http://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-may-2017-unesco-resolution-on-occupied-palestine/), Israel and the US were actively involved in efforts to get nations that might support a watered-down resolution to vote against it.

Condemnation of Israel at UNESCO may become even worse, as a former Qatari Culture Minister, Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari, is in the [running](https://www.algemeiner.com/2017/04/28/leading-jewish-group-warns-of-negative-ramifications-for-israel-if-qatari-diplomat-becomes-next-unesco-chief/) to be selected as a successor to the current director-general Irina Bokova in November.

**New US Ambassador Nikki Haley putting bias issues front and centre**

Despite the UNESCO resolution passing, the outcome of the vote may represent a change in the air at the UN. This change has been led by the US and in particular, its new Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley who has [declared](http://www.nysun.com/editorials/haleys-comet/89905/), "the UN's anti-Israel bias... is long overdue for a change."

At her first press briefing following a UN Security Council monthly meeting devoted to the Middle East, Haley could not believe that the meeting focused on Israel, while ignoring the role of Iran and Syria in destabilsing the Middle East. Haley [said](http://www.nysun.com/editorials/haleys-comet/89905/):

"I am new around here, but I understand that's how the Council has operated month after month for decades. I am here to say the United States will not turn a blind eye to this anymore. I am here to underscore to the ironclad support of the United States for Israel. I am here to emphasize that the United States is determined to stand up to the UN's anti-Israel bias." Haley added, "The outrageously biased resolutions from the Security Council and the General Assembly only make peace harder to attain by discouraging one of the parties from going to the negotiating table."

Haley has also taken issue with the UN department's political affairs division on Palestinian affairs, she [said](http://www.nysun.com/editorials/haleys-comet/89905/):

"The UN department of political affairs has an entire division devoted entirely to Palestinian affairs. Imagine that. There is no division devoted to illegal missile launches form North Korea. There is no division devoted to the world's number one state sponsor of terror, Iran. The prejudiced approach to Israeli-Palestinian issues does the peace process no favors, and it bears no relationship to the reality of the world around us. The double standards are breathtaking."

When it comes to Haley it is not just talk, she has already implemented changes. When the US held the [presidency](http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/UNSC-will-not-discuss-Israeli-Palestinian-conflict-under-Nikki-Haley-presidency-486035) of the Security Council for a month in April, Haley ensured that the focus would be on Iran, instead of an "Israel bashing" session and said, "Iran is using Hezbollah to expand its regional aspirations. That is a threat that should be dominating our discussions at the Security Council." She noted Iran's complicity in the atrocities in Syria, its militias standing "side by side with Syrian troops as they slaughter the Syrian people", and said "Hezbollah helped Assad starve and destroy Aleppo."

Moreover, during a meeting with Palestinian Authority envoy Riyad Mansour, Haley [urged](https://www.algemeiner.com/2017/03/31/american-un-ambassador-nikki-haley-all-ive-done-with-israel-is-tell-the-truth/) the Palestinians to resume negotiations with Israel, and indicated that unilateral actions at the UN will not have US support. Haley believes that UN initiatives on the Israeli- Palestinian conflict have so far "been more of a hindrance toward the peace process than a help, because it's caused defensiveness to happen and that's never healthy for anything."

When asked about her outspoken defence of Israel at the UN, Haley [responded](https://www.algemeiner.com/2017/03/31/in-new-york-times-nikki-haley-coverage-truth-is-a-slogan-not-reality/) by saying, "All I've done with Israel is tell the truth... so when I saw something wrong, I called it out."

**US Senate backs Haley's efforts**

Haley has received high praise from both Democrats and Republicans in the US Senate. The Senate recently sent a unanimous [letter](https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f6c7c142-8655-4c34-907b-ffe91b033f34/83A98BDD8379F7A35D6207DCB0D74B38.4-27-2017-rubio-coons-ltr-to-unsg-re-israel.pdf) signed by all 100 members to the UN Secretary General António Guterres praising Haley's comments condemning anti-Israel bias at the UN, and calling on the UN to implement changes.

The letter stated that, "too often, the U.N. is exploited as a vehicle for targeting Israel rather than as a forum committed to advancing the lofty goals of its founders. These actions have at times reinforced the broader scourge of anti-Semitism, and distracted certain U.N. entities from their original missions," adding, "We urge you to ensure that Israel is treated neither better nor worse than any other UN member in good standing."

The senators called on the UN to improve its treatment of Israel, including by: eliminating or reforming committees which only serve to "attack Israel" and inspire the boycott movement; ending UNESCO's denial of the Jewish connection to Jerusalem; reforming the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); and for reform of the United Nations Human Rights Council to "end the Council's imbalanced focus on Israel" and to instead focus on human rights abuses in countries such as Russia, China, North Korea, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela and South Sudan.

The senators concluded the letter by offering their assistance, saying, "If you continue to build on your recent action, we stand ready to work with you to eliminate the organization's anti-Israel bias and to fight anti-Semitism in all its forms."
 **UN Secretary-General on board?**

The senators may find a sympathetic ear in new UN Secretary General Guterres, who recently spoke at the World Jewish Congress' Plenary Assembly in New York and [said](http://www.jta.org/2017/04/23/news-opinion/world/un-secretary-general-denial-of-israels-right-to-exist-is-modern-form-of-anti-semitism):

"A modern form of anti-Semitism is the denial of the right of the State of Israel to exist," adding, "As secretary-general of the United Nations, I can say that the State of Israel needs to be treated as any other state, with exactly the same rules."

In his speech, Guterres also called the Holocaust "the most heinous crime in the history of mankind" and promised to marshal the U.N. to eliminate antisemitism which he noted was "alive and well". He said, "You can be absolutely sure, as secretary-general of the United Nations, I will be in the front line of the struggle against anti-Semitism, and to make sure the United Nations is able to take all possible actions for anti-Semitism to be condemned, and if possible, eradicated from the face of the earth."

Given the numbers game which controls the UN, and the majority that the Arab and Muslim-majority states, together with their allies, can muster in the world body, it is unlikely the UN will become genuinely fair in its treatment of Israel anytime soon.

Nonetheless, the leadership of Haley and the letter from the Senators demonstrate that it is possible to effectively challenge some of the institutionalised bias at the UN which has led to an obsession with Israel and a mockery of the UN's intended purpose and ideals. We can at least hope that US leadership has created needed momentum to reduce Israel's unfair treatment at the UN.