As Israel Opposes UNESCO Jerusalem Resolution, Ambassadors Visit Capital

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<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/UNESCO-ambassadors-US-senators-tour-Jerusalems-City-of-David-484785>

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat on Tuesday led six foreign ambassadors on a private tour of the City of David as part of Israel’s campaign against pending resolutions on Jerusalem before that body, which are expected to ignore Jewish ties to the Temple Mount.

On Tuesday, Barkat, David Be’eri, director and founder of the City of David Foundation, and Carmel Shama Hacohen, Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, showed the ambassadors the remains of the Pool of Siloam and numerous archeological findings from the site. Last week, Be’eri was declared the 2017 Israel Prize laureate, one of the nation’s highest honors.

“These findings strongly contradict UNESCO’s claims that deny the historical connection between the Jewish people and the Christian world to the Land of Israel,” said Barkat, who did not disclose the identities of the ambassadors.

Since 2015, the Palestinians have succeeded in getting resolutions passed before UNESCO Boards and Committees that refer to the Temple Mount solely by its Muslim name of Haram Al-Sharif – ostensibly eliminating its connection to Judaism and Christianity.

Israel is gearing up for similar resolutions that are likely to come before the body’s 58-member executive board in Paris at its meeting from April 19 through May 4 and before the World Heritage Committee in Krakow in July.

All the Ambassadors to UNESCO on this trip represent countries that stood with Israel and voted against the resolutions.

“The coin you see in my hands, found in the City of David excavations, is emblazoned with the inscription ‘For the Liberation of Zion.’ This coin is one of thousands that we find at our feet, which unequivocally prove the Jewish and Christian roots in Jerusalem, contrary to the claims made by the latest UNESCO resolution,” Barkat said. “Today, we work to fulfill the imperative emblazoned on the coin: Jerusalem, under Israeli sovereignty, is free and open to people of all religions, beliefs and backgrounds.”

He was joined on the tour by Israel’s Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama- HaCohen.

Over the weekend, US Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and James Lankford (R-OK), both members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, also stopped to visit the City of David for a private tour during their Middle East tour.

The senators were part of a delegation of Republican members of the committee who will also visit Lebanon and Jordan.

“I want to thank the City of David Foundation for all the work they’re doing,” said Rubio. “It’s a phenomenal rediscovery of the extraordinary history of this city that is so important to people of my faith, to the Jewish faith, and to the world. I’m looking forward to coming back in the future and seeing how much progress has been made.”

In October, Rubio sent a letter to then- US president Barack Obama and former secretary of state John Kerry to oppose and condemn the UNESCO resolution.

“At a time when the Middle East is in turmoil and historical heritage sites are being destroyed by groups such as ISIS, it is imperative that the US stands with Israel, our closest ally, and the sole democracy in the region,” the letter stated.

“Recent UNESCO resolutions that deny Jewish and Christian ties to holy sites in Jerusalem not only reinforce the necessity of withholding American funding from this counterproductive UN organization, but also call into question future US membership in UNESCO.”

Following their tour of the ongoing excavation of the Second Temple Pilgrimage Road, leading from the Pool of Siloam to the Western Wall, Lankford said he was particularly moved.

“Standing here in the City of David and getting to see the 2,000-year-old path that’s being excavated, I’m grateful to the people involved in the long, hard work of exposing this important history... it’s just remarkable to see the progress,” he said. “I’m excited for what’s yet to come.”

The City of David, an Israel National Heritage Site with half a million visitors annually, is the archeological site of ancient Jerusalem – located adjacent to the Western Wall and Temple Mount, just outside the Old City’s walls – whose beginnings are dated to the Early Bronze Age (1850 BCE).

Be’eri, who will receive the Israel Prize for lifetime achievement, also joined the senators for the tour.

“The 50th year reunion of Jerusalem is a great opportunity to better appreciate David’le Be’eri as one of the greatest builders of Jerusalem in modern times,” said Education Minister Naftali Bennett upon making the announcement last Thursday.