UNESCO to pass ‘most extreme’ Jerusalem resolution next week

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The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture is expected next week to pass another resolution on Jerusalem that an Israeli official has denounced as “the most extreme and problematic text” ever proposed.

At first blush, the short text appears harmless from an Israeli perspective, devoid of any incendiary claims or designations. And yet, Jerusalem opposes it because it cites previous UN resolutions on Middle Eastern affairs, thus legitimizing more problematic formulations “through the back door,” Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama Hacohen, said.

The resolution, sponsored by Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Sudan, consists of only four paragraphs. Two recall previous resolutions, one calls for their implementation and future discussion, and one reaffirms “the importance of Jerusalem for the three monotheistic religions.”

UNESCO has passed “less elegant” resolutions in the past, Shama Hacohen acknowledged, but nonetheless condemned next week’s draft as “the most extreme and problematic text we have ever seen.”

In a letter to fellow UNESCO envoys, a copy of which was obtained by The Times of Israel, he argued that the text’s brevity and lack of offensive language against Israel was misleading. Rather, he said, the resolution is “based on politicization and hateful propaganda against UNESCO’s core mandate and own sake, as well as against the Jewish People and the State of Israel.”

For one, the resolution is entitled “Occupied Palestine,” which the Israeli envoy argued is a “pure[ly] political title.”

Furthermore, the draft refers to the 1981 inscription of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls in UNESCO’s World Heritage List, and the subsequent decision to add the site to UNESCO’s list of World Heritage in Danger. Both requests were made by Jordan and “were, and are, political fictions,” Shama Hacohen wrote.

The draft resolution goes on to cite more than a dozen previous UNESCO Executive Board resolutions, including those that used only Arab terms for the Temple Mount or accused Israel of desecrating Muslim graves in the Old City.

Ironically, Shama Hacohen noted, the current resolution cites resolutions from which the Arab group at UNESCO had distanced itself.

Furthermore, it cites UN Security Council Resolution 2334 from December 2016, which stated that Israeli settlements constitute “a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.”

It also recalls last year’s UN General Assembly Resolution ES-10/L.22, which condemned the US administration’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

“This is a new peak of the attempts to pollute UNESCO with politicization and the obsessed persecution of Israel,” Shama Hacohen wrote.

“This current text brings all the problematic elements right through the back door, trying to drag Permanent Delegates who opposed it in the past to support it indirectly,” he added.

The draft, which is scheduled to be voted on April 11 at the Executive Board’s 204th session in Paris, “enhances the dangerous politicization [of UNESCO] and brings it to its climax by recycling, copying, pasting and reaffirming all offensive previous resolutions,” he said.

The Israeli ambassador “strongly support[ed]” the resolution’s line about Jerusalem being important to all three monotheistic religions, but dismissed its inclusion as “lip service.”

UNESCO’s Executive Board consists of 58 member states, including more than a dozen Arab and Muslim states.

Last October, [the US](https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-withdraws-from-unesco-citing-anti-israel-bias/) and [Israel decided to withdraw from UNESCO](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-planned-withdrawal-from-unesco-unlikely-to-improve-anything/), citing among other reasons the body’s anti-Israel bias.

“Our goal in the transition year until the final disengagement from UNESCO is to prevent the passing of resolutions by consensus that are unacceptable to Israel, and that is what we are currently attempting to achieve,” Shama Hacohen said. “In the new and problematic composition of the Executive Committee, and now that we and the US are outside with one leg and a half, it is somewhat complicated, but doable.”