Contentious UNESCO Resolution on Jerusalem Shelved

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The UN’s Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) delayed Tuesday a controversial vote on a draft resolution that would challenge Jewish historical ties to the Old City of Jerusalem.

The vote was postponed minutes before the proceedings began when the Palestinian and Jordanian delegations, which had proposed the resolution, could not secure enough votes to ensure its passage. It is unclear if and when they will propose the resolution again.

Israel has put pressure on UN members to reject the vote, including in a letter Monday by Foreign Ministry chief [Dore Gold](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-urges-unesco-to-reject-one-sided-jerusalem-resolution/), and [vocal complaints](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-slams-unesco-members-erasing-jewish-ties-to-jerusalem/) from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after a previous UNESCO vote on Jerusalem in April.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Emmanuel Nahshon told The Times of Israel that the Jewish state’s diplomats had worked hard to reach attain this outcome.

“Israel is constantly working, both directly and through friendly countries, to prevent the resolution’s proposal, as well as to ensure a majority is not reached,” he said.

The revised joint Palestinian-Jordanian draft resolution on “the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls” was submitted to the 21-member committee, which convened for its annual meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, on July 10-20.

The text calls for a return of the Temple Mount and the Al-Aqsa Mosque to what it called “the historic status quo” following the 1967 Six Day War, under which the Jordanian Waqf religious authority had the right to administer all aspects of the sites “including maintenance, restoration, and regulating access.”

Under arrangements agreed to by Israel after it captured the area, non-Muslims are allowed to visit the site but not to pray. The Palestinians says Israel is seeking to change this, a charge the Jewish state adamantly denies.

A similar resolution adopted by UNESCO’s executive board in April infuriated Israel.

The complex, which was the site of the two biblical temples, is Judaism’s holiest site. Muslims regard the compound — today it houses the Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock mosques — as the third-holiest site in Islam.

While Jews are allowed to enter the site, their worship there is banned under arrangements instituted by Israel when it captured the area from Jordan in 1967.

The site has been a focal point of violence wracking Israel and the West Bank over the past 10 months, amid claims by Palestinian leaders, vehemently denied by Israel, that the government plans to change the status quo on the Temple Mount. Some 40 victims have been killed in Palestinian stabbing, shooting and car-ramming attacks.

In the UN document, Israel is repeatedly referred to as the “occupying power” while being accused of causing damage to the site, conducting illegal excavations and preventing the Jordanian Waqf, which administers the site, from conducting repairs and renovations. The text also refers to the Western Wall plaza in quotation marks, after using the Arabic term Al-Buraq Plaza without qualification.

In the draft, the Jordanians and Palestinians accuse Israel of “intrusive constructions, tunneling and underground excavations” and “aggressions against religious sites and prayer places.”

The April resolution criticized Israel for “excavations and works” in East Jerusalem, and urged it to stop “aggressions and illegal measures against the freedom of worship and Muslims’ access” to their holy site. The resolution also accused Israel of “planting fake Jewish graves in Muslim cemeteries” and of “the continued conversion of many Islamic and Byzantine remains into the so-called Jewish ritual baths or into Jewish prayer places.”

The April resolution was approved by 33 states of the 58-member body, including Russia, Spain, Sweden, France and Brazil. The latter two have since backtracked, calling their respective votes a mistake. Seventeen countries abstained while six voted against — the United States, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.