Arab envoy apologizes for not voting against UNESCO resolution

July 9, 2017

By Itamar Eichner

YNet News

[https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4986580,00.html](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4986580%2C00.html)

An Arab ambassador of a country that does not have diplomatic ties has apologized to his Israeli counterpart Carmel Shama-Hacohen for not being able to vote against the [UNESCO resolution](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4986036%2C00.html) declaring Hebron's Old City—and with it the Cave of the Patriarchs—as a Palestinian World Heritage Site.

The Arab ambassador conditioned his support to Israel in a [secret ballot vote](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4981985%2C00.html) at UNESCO. But when the vote was held out in the open rather than at a private voting booth, the ambassador had no choice but to go back on his promise.

The resolution passed on Friday with 12 member states voting in favor, three voting against and six abstaining.

"Sorry for today, it was too heated, it is difficult to say it was a secret vote..." the ambassador told Shama-Hacohen in a message, later adding: "No choice..."

"I know my friend. For me, it is like you did it," Shama-Hacohen responded.

The resolution, which recognizes the Cave of the Patriarchs as a Palestinian World Heritage Site in danger, does not recognize Jewish or Christian ties to the place, where key Biblical figures Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives Sara, Rebecca and Leah—the patriarchs and matriarchs of the people of Israel—are buried.

This resolution serves to cement international views that see the Cave of the Patriarchs as a Muslim, Palestinian site. In a broader sense, such recognition also impacts the question of sovereignty and historical rights over other sites the Palestinians are claiming.

Such recognition also puts limitations on Israeli construction, preservation and development of the site and the area around it. For any security checkpoint set up or works done by Israel at the site, it will now be accused of the destruction of a World Heritage Site.

The resolution was met with [much condemnation from Israel](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4986097%2C00.html) and from [the United States](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4986238%2C00.html).

In response to the resolution, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to cut another $1 million from the membership fees Israel pays the UN and use that money instead to build a museum of Jewish heritage in Kiryat Arba and Hebron, as well as promote other heritage projects in the city.

This is the fourth time the State of Israel has reduced its funding to the UN in protest of anti-Israeli decisions.

Israeli officials estimated there would be further response, with possible options including Israel leaving UNESCO or announcing construction in Hebron and Kiryat Arba.