

June 16, 2017

Your Excellency,

On behalf of B'nai B'rith International – the oldest and most widely known Jewish humanitarian, advocacy and social action organization, with members in nearly 50 countries – we are writing to urge you to reject the latest Palestinian attempts to politicize the work of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) at its upcoming session in Krakow, Poland, in July. The incorporation of partisan political agendas into UNESCO's deliberations endangers the credibility of the organization as a whole, and of the committee in particular, in the vital endeavor of cultural preservation.

As you know, the Palestinians and member states hostile to Israel are likely at the upcoming WHC session to raise matters related to the cities of Jerusalem and Hebron. On Jerusalem, the Palestinians have devastated UNESCO's reputation by putting forward past inflammatory resolutions that have absurdly sought to erase the Jewish connection to the Temple Mount—the holiest site in Judaism—and tried to completely deny Israel's sovereignty in its capital city, to say nothing of an endless list of distortions and baseless accusations against Israel. If UNESCO is to begin to try to rehabilitate its image, the first step must be a rejection of biased, offensive resolutions on Jerusalem.

On Hebron, the Palestinians are attempting to name the Cave of the Patriarchs (Me'arat Ha'machpela in Hebrew) to the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger. Though profoundly holy to three major world faiths, the site is not yet on the World Heritage list. More to the point, it is not in danger. The site is operated by Israel in accordance with agreements with the Palestinian Authority and is open to people of diverse faiths. This was not always the case—prior to Israel's gaining control of Hebron in 1967, Jews had not been allowed to enter the sacred place, in their second holiest city, for centuries.

Jerusalem and Hebron involve highly sensitive issues that will have to be addressed in bilateral peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Unnecessary UNESCO resolutions that attack Israel with a litany of false accusations, or deny Jews' connection to their holiest of sites, will not bring about conditions in which peace can thrive. These resolutions only make peace more difficult to achieve and will continue to degrade the credibility of UNESCO. We strongly urge you to reject any anti-Israel resolution put forward at the WHC next month.

Sincerely,

Gary P. Saltzman
President

Daniel S. Mariaschin
Executive Vice President