UNESCO to vote on resolutions ignoring Jewish ties to Temple Mount

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UNESCO is slated to vote twice this month on Palestinian initiated resolutions that ignore Jewish ties to its most holy religious site of the Temple Mount and the Western Wall area in Jerusalem.

The first of these votes will be taken on Thursday or Friday of this week by the 58-member Executive Board of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris.

In advance of that vote, Israel’s Mission to UNESCO in Paris, has given board members and international diplomats a brochure detailing the deep historical connections Judaism has to those sites, which are also holy to Christianity and Islam.

“These facts and evidences will leave no doubt, and without undermining other connection of other religions to the holy places in Jerusalem, of the deepest and longest Jewish presence in Jerusalem since ancient times,” Israel’s Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama-Hacohen wrote.

“Every attempt to distort the history and harm the above mentioned relations of the Jewish people and Jerusalem, is an attempt to rewrite the history in a dangerous, unfair and one-sided manner,” he said.

Among the evidence listed in the brochure is a 9th Century BC inscription referring to the House of David, an 8th Century BC seal from King Hezekiah, and a stone etching of the Jewish Menorah from the year 66 AD found in Jerusalem.

The Executive Board vote will be followed by another vote on a similarly worded resolution that will be brought before the World Heritage Committee that is meeting in Paris on October 24-26.

The resolutions, which have been informally put forward by the Palestinians, take Israel to task for a wide range of activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The initial parts of the text focus on the Temple Mount area. The language used in the resolutions refers to the Temple Mount area almost exclusively by is Muslim name of Al-Haram Al-Sharrif (the Noble Sanctuary).

The text, however, does state that Jerusalem and its Old City walls are important to all three religions.

In the draft of the Executive Board resolution dated September 2016 that was shown to The Jerusalem Post, the Western Wall was mentioned twice in quotes. Otherwise it was referenced in the text by its Muslim name of the Buraq Plaza.

As a member state of UNESCO since 2011, Palestine may submit resolutions to UNESCO bodies such as the World Heritage Committee.

In 2015 the Palestinian government began a UNESCO campaign to reclassify the Temple Mount, but failed to garner enough support for an October resolution that would have formally declared the area as an exclusively Muslim shrine.

When UNESCO’s 58-member Executive Board met in Paris in April, 2016, it adopted a resolution that spoke solely of Muslim ties to the Temple Mount.

In July, another resolution with the same linguistic issue was brought forward by the Palestinians and the Jordanians to the 21-member World Heritage Committee.

The matter was moved to the October 24-26 meeting without a vote, when the failed coup in Turkey forced UNESCO to cut short that July session.

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova has in the past spoken out against such resolutions stating: “To deny or conceal any of the Jewish, Christian or Muslim traditions undermines the integrity of the site, and runs counter to the reasons that justified its inscription in 1981.”

Ultimately, however, the decision to pass these resolutions is up to the member states on the various UNESCO committees.

A bi-partisan group of 39 US Congressmen led by US Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla) wrote a letter this week to the Executive Board members asking them to vote against the latest resolution when the matter is brought up on Thursday and Friday of this week.

“This resolution flies in the face of, among other things, science as recent archeological excavations, notably in the City of David, have revealed incontrovertible, physical evidence that reaffirms Jewish and Christian ties to the holy city of Jerusalem,” Cruz said.

Rep. Ros-Lehtinen said that the resolution implies that “Jerusalem is inconsequential to Jews and Christians, with the intent of laying the groundwork for additional UN efforts to delegitimize Israel and undermine its status as the capital of the Jewish State.”

“UNESCO was created to build intercultural understanding yet, as is the case across the entire UN system, intolerance and intentionally corrosive behavior on the part of many of the organization's members has undermined its original mission and only further underscores the need for drastic reform throughout the entire UN system,” Ros-Lehtinen said.