**Qatar’s Anti-Christian And Anti-Semitic Policies Should Bar It From UNESCO Seat**

May 11, 2017

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Daily Caller

http://dailycaller.com/2017/05/11/qatars-anti-christian-and-anti-semitic-policies-should-bar-it-from-unesco-seat/

Irina Bokova made history when she acceded to the role of Director General of UNESCO. She was the first woman and first person from a former communist state to lead the organization which has an annual budget of over half a billion dollars.

Now the race is on to find a successor to Bokova and Qatar’s former minister of culture, Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari, is seen by many to be the frontrunner.

Qatar’s long history of intolerance towards Christians, Jews, and other religious minorities should dissuade the United Nations from choosing Al-Kawari as the head of UNESCO.

A host of Jewish groups have pointed out that Qatari publishers routinely publish anti-Semitic tracts which are featured at Qatar’s Doha Book Festival and other events in the region. Al-Kawari himself wrote a forward to a book of Arabic poetry which includes anti-Semitic conspiracy theories according to the [Simon Wiesenthal Center](http://www.timesofisrael.com/wiesenthal-center-opposes-qatari-candidate-for-unesco-head/). Some of these anti-Semitic books were part of Qatari funded display at a German book festival.

At UNESCO, Qatar is opposed to any Jewish character for Jerusalem.

Qatar’s treatment of Christians and Christanity within the emirate is also worth noting.

There is nary a mention in Doha of the country’s Christian heritage where Christianity flourished into the 9th century A.D long after the arrival of Islam. Despite the fact that Isaac of Ninevehe the last saint (chronologically speaking) to be recognized by every apostolic Church of the Christian East was born there.

This lapse is just one example of how Qatar lags behind its Gulf neighbors in religious tolerance towards non-Muslims. Nearby Bahrain is home to a historic synagogue and an American Mission Hospital founded in 1903. In the hospital’s cemetery Christians, Muslims, and Jews are all buried together.  Dubai has had an active Hindu temple over a hundred years.

Against considerable public backlash Qatar finally opened its first [church](http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/03/14/first-catholic-church-opens-in-qatar-sparking-fear-backlash-against-christians.html) in this century in 2008. Despite the rather generic appearance of the building it was widely protested by Qataris. I guess that’s progress — neighboring Saudi Arabia still does not allow public places of worship for non-Muslims.

Yet, Qatar — which has a population of just over 2 million – has instead tried to buy its way into becoming a cultural super-power with mixed results. In 2013, while Al-Kawari was culture minister, Doha hosted an exhibit titled, “The Olympics — Past and Present” It was a big deal for Qatar and for Greece. Qatar wants to be seen as a possible future Olympic host after it hosts the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Greece is always looking for another country to bail it out. Thus, Greece sent an official government delegation and ancient Greek statues to the exhibit.

The Greeks were shocked however to find the naked statues had been hidden behind a black cloth by the Qatari exhibitors. In an authoritarian state like Qatar it is highly doubtful such a move was taken without Al-Kawari’s personal orders. The Greeks asked the statues be unveiled. Qatar demurred and sent the [statutes](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/04/30/180081353/qatar-covers-nude-statues-greeks-take-them-back) on air freight shipment back to Greece.

To smooth over the Diplomatic row, Qatar’s ruling emir at the time pledged to invest in Greece. Though not exactly in the manner the Greek’s had likely hoped. The Emir announced plans to build palaces for some of his wives on Greeks islands.

It is bad enough that autocracies with a history of extensive human rights violations vote in the United Nations and serve on U.N. commissions.  They should not be allowed to buy seats and influential positions in international humanitarian organizations.