The Self-Destruction of UNESCO

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On April 11 2016 the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted a decision, proposed by Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman and Sudan, entitled “Occupied Palestine”.

The very title of this decision perhaps betrays and undermines what one should expect from an international body ostensibly dedicated to education, science and culture.

The decision condemns all Israeli presence and activities in Jerusalem, Hebron and the tomb of Rachel. In so doing it pointedly and deliberately denies, ignores, and seeks to delete from history, any historic, cultural and religious link between the Jewish People, the Jewish religion and Jerusalem, including specifically its holy religious site of the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, the Machpela Cave in Hebron and Rachel’s tomb near Bethlehem.

The decision refers to these Jewish Holy solely in a context of “safeguarding the cultural heritage of Palestine”, to the complete exclusion of the cultural and historic heritage and rights of the Jewish People.

It ignores and denies the age-old indigenous Jewish historic linkage of the area to Judaism, Jewish history and religion and ignores the existence of the remnants of Jewish holy sites and the fact that this area is universally recognized by all as “Temple Mount”, attesting to the fact that this was indeed the site of the Jewish Temples, and as such the cradle of all Jewish existence and history.

In this context, even the Western Wall plaza is referred to as “Al-Buraq Plaza."

The age-old Jewish sites - the “Cave of Machpela” in Hebron, and “the Cave of Rachel” close to Bethlehem – universally acknowledged to be the burial sites of the forefathers of the Jewish People Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Rachel respectively, are cynically denominated by this curious UNESCO decision as “The two Palestinian sites of Al-Haram Al Ibrahimi Tomb of the Patriarchs in Al-Khalil/Hebron and the Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque/Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem”.

The cynicism is further compounded by a curious condemnation of Israel’s refusal “to remove the two Palestinian sites from Israel’s national heritage list”! Out of the 58 states members of the UNESCO Executive Board, France, Spain, Sweden, Russia and Slovenia – all ostensibly “friends” of Israel - supported this obnoxious and shameful decision, while only six states voted against - Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In retrospect, no-one should be surprised at the fact that UNESCO adopted this decision.

It follows similar decisions over the past years by UNESCO bodies at the urging chiefly of Arab and Muslim states, directed to advancing an extreme and politically partisan agenda having absolutely no bearing on the cultural and educational functions for which UNESCO was established. These decisions are intended to instill a narrative of denial of Jewish rights, and to have this denial disseminated throughout the educational framework of all UN organizations.

It is not by chance that UNESCO, of all the UN specialized agencies, accepted the Palestinians as a full, state member of the organization, despite constitutional requirements limiting membership to genuine states only.

But this latest decision is singular in the fact that UNESCO, which has for long been considered and heralded to be the world’s central body for the advancement of truth, culture, education and science, has been hijacked and turned into another Israel-bashing body.

It has been totally abused by Arab and Muslim states and those that support them, with a single agenda, to rewrite history, to pervert truth and to use UNESCO as an international platform for this purpose.

These states are blatantly and cynically mocking the lofty and sincere aims and hopes set out in the 1945 Constitution of UNESCO (to which France is a signatory party) to combat ignorance, prejudice, suspicion, inequality and mistrust between peoples, and to advance dignity, equality, mutual respect and intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

This blatant abuse of a universal international body for the sole purpose of denying the very history, culture and integrity of the Jewish People and religion, should be of the utmost concern to the international community as a whole, to the United Nations in particular, as well as to the states members of UNESCO that supported the resolution.

It is the very antithesis of what UNESCO was established to achieve, and in effect undermines the very fabric of the organized international community.

Would it be overly unreasonable to expect the Secretary General of the UN to voice his reservation and total rejection of, and disassociation from this decision and to call for its revocation?

By the same token, rather than vaguely paying lip-service and calling for “respect and dialogue with regards to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound or Temple Mount, revered by both Muslims and Jews”, might it not be unreasonable to expect that the Director-General of UNESCO actively and urgently intervenes in order to have the resolution revoked and to institute a review of the politicization of the functioning of her organization?

With a view to saving UNESCO and preventing its total self-destruction, the member-states must undertake a thorough and urgent review of the manner in which their organization, its integrity and the viability of its continued functioning as a specialized agency, have been prejudiced, abused and hijacked to serve the political aims of the Arab and Moslem states.

The US, Israel and other responsible states should suspend their continued membership in UNESCO, including payment of membership fees and cultural and scientific cooperation, until the organization takes the measures necessary to reverse its acute political radicalization, and returns to fulfill the functions for which it was established.

States that supported the resolution – and among them France, which is seeking to host an international conference and to play a central role in the Israel-Palestinian peace process, should be called upon by the Israeli leadership to announce the revocation of their vote and to disassociate themselves from the decision.