Israel launches new plan to ‘defend Jerusalem’ in international arena

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The Israeli government is launching a new plan to “defend Jerusalem in the international arena,” Jerusalem and Heritage Minister Ze’ev Elkin announced Monday.

Addressing a conference for Christian journalists in the capital, Elkin said Jerusalem was under “an unprecedented assault,” pointing to recent resolutions passed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that ignored the Jewish people’s link to the city.

Together with the Foreign Ministry, Elkin said his office was committed to “prepare, budget and lead” a project to defend Jerusalem from various historical distortions.

“The plan will include visits to Jerusalem of influencers from diverse fields and nations, who will be exposed directly to the past and present of this wondrous city, and will be able to take part in the holy task of defending its future,” he said.

“All who wander even a single day in the streets of ancient Jerusalem, in the City of David, in the Old City, on the Mount of Olives, who touch its stones and listen to what they have to say, will be incapable of taking part in that erasing of the history of this city.”

His ministry is planning to hold several “large conferences” in Jerusalem this year, he added. The list includes a gathering of jurists on how international law views the status of Jerusalem, a conference bringing together the Knesset with parliamentary friendship caucuses from around the world, and a new scientific gathering on the the city’s archaeology and history.

“This city knows how to defend its good name and its past. One only has to come to her, to open one’s heart and to listen to what she has to say,” Elkin said.

Elkin’s office also decided to establish a permanent international “Defender of Jerusalem” prize designated for individuals who “contributed in unique ways to the battle for Jerusalem’s international standing and against the warping of history,” he announced.

The committee selecting the honorees will include Jewish Agency chairman Natan Sharansky, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat, former Hebrew University president Menachem Ben-Sasson, Jerusalem Foundation head Johanna Arbib and others.

Addressing the Government Press Office’s first-ever Christian Media Summit, Elkin hailed Jerusalem as the most important city in Judaism and “the birthplace of the Christian faith, in whose streets occurred the defining events of Christian history and consciousness, the Christian story.”

He then launched a bitter attack against UNESCO, arguing that resolutions on the status of the city attempted to erase Jewish and Christian history.

“Today, Jerusalem is at the eye of a storm, under an unprecedented assault born from malice and ignorance that attempts to rewrite her history and erase her deep link to the millennia-old history of the Jewish people,” he charged.

“This assault is directed not only at Jerusalem’s Jewish roots, but also at the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith,” Elkin — a former historian — went on.

“Anyone who attempts to erase from history the Jerusalem of King David and King Solomon, of the greatest of the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Jerusalem of Ezra and Nehemia, and of the Maccabees, and the Jerusalem of the last days of the Second Temple that served as a central arena for the greatest events the shaped Christian consciousness – that same rewriter of history denies the Bible in its entirety.”

He went on: “Recent UNESCO resolutions are politically motivated attempts to portray the city as holy only to Islam and the Arab nation. History will view these decisions as low points in the annals of international institutions.”

Last week, Israel announced it would follow the United States in quitting UNESCO due to what it said was the Paris-based organization’s anti-Israel bias.

UNESCO has become “a platform for delusional, anti-Israeli and – in effect – anti-Semitic decisions,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday. “We hope that the organization will change its ways but we are not pinning hopes on this; therefore, my directive to leave the organization stands and we will move forward to carry it out.”