'Restore integrity to UNESCO'

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By Miri Regev

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Dear Mrs. Azoulay,

Please accept my heartfelt congratulations on your election as Director General of UNESCO.

In recent years we have been watching in sorrow as this important organization has been losing its professional prestige whilst becoming a tool for political attacks against the state of Israel and against the entire Jewish People. The organization, which has championed the value of imparting historical heritage, is losing its way when it comes to Israel and our important historical sites.

The organization's resolutions have become professionally and historically baseless, serving as a propaganda tool for rewriting history.

This trend has culminated in the recent distorted decisions regarding the declaration of the Temple Mount and of the Tomb of the Patriarchs as Palestinian Heritage sites, completely ignoring the deep connection of the Jewish People to these sites, treating them as a foreign occupier.

These heritage sites and other archaeological sites in the Land of Israel, are a remarkable expression of the extraordinary affinity of the Jewish People to the historical and sacred regions of our people. Whatever the opinion of any individual regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, there can be no denial of the deep connection of the Jewish People to sites such as the Tomb of the Patriarchs and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

As the Minister of Culture, the Israel Antiquities Authority and the preservation of historical sites are an important part of my portfolio. In that capacity, I have condemned UNESCO's resolutions on Israel, and have strengthened and supported our Prime Minister, Mr. Binyamin Netanyahu, in his decision to join the United States in announcing our withdrawal from the organization.

However, your election as head of the organization has given me new hope that perhaps the historical truth in matters concerning Israel will now, under your leadership, be treated fairly and objectively, as appropriate for an international organization like UNESCO.

I am certain that as a member of a Jewish family which for years has supported the state of Israel, you share my feelings on hearing the eternal words, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning," words which Jews have taken with them through the centuries. You, like me, are familiar with the verses of the Book of Genesis in the Torah describing the purchase of the Cave of the Patriarchs by Abraham and the burial of Sarah there, and like me, you can hear the prayers of Jews through the ages to return to these places.

Mrs. Azoulay, just as France has no need for the UNESCO seal to confirm its connection to the Pantheon in Paris, and just as China has no need for such a seal to affirm its connection to the Great Wall of China, so the Jewish People - of which you are a part - does not need the UNESCO seal to certify its connection to the land of Israel and to Jerusalem its capital.

The validity of this certificate lies in our eternal Kushan, or deed – the book of the Tanach, the Bible, and the long history from Biblical times to the present, a history of exile and redemption, kingdom and temple, prayers and yearnings.

I hope that your statements from last week will not remain mere declarations, but will lead to the cancellations of these problematic decisions, and the restoration of relations between those who seek justice and truth throughout the world, and UNESCO. Thus, once your appointment is ratified by the relevant body, you will restore integrity to international discourse and save the honor of the important international organization which you have been chosen to lead.

With warmest regards,

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Minister of Culture and Sport