UNESCO Condemns Israeli ‘Aggression’ in Jerusalem, Ignores Palestinian Violence

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UNESCO’s Executive Board on Wednesday solely condemned Israeli “aggression” on the Temple Mount, but backed away from reclassifying the Western Wall as a Muslim holy site.

The Foreign Ministry said the resolution “aims to transform the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a religious confrontation and its adoption is a disgrace.”

The 58-member body in Paris voted 26 in favor, six against, with 15 abstentions.

The US, Germany, United Kingdom, Estonia, Netherlands and Czech Republic voted against the resolution.

A number of other European countries, such as Austria, Spain, France, Italy and Macedonia were among those that abstained, along with Ethiopia, Angola and Albania.

An initial draft text of the resolution submitted on behalf of the Palestinian Authority had said UNESCO “affirms that the Buraq Plaza is an integral part of al-Aksa Mosque/ al-Haram al-Sharif.”

Under pressure from the Europeans, the US, Russia and UNESCO director-general Irina Bokova, however, that line on the Western Wall was pulled at the last moment by the resolution’s authors – Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

But the resolution retained a line which affirmed, for the first time, that the Mugrabi Gate, whose ramp is built over the women’s section of the Western Wall, “is an integral part of al-Aksa mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif.”

Israel’s Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama Hacohen said in a speech to the board before the vote that, “The Western Wall and Jerusalem are the heart and the soul of every Jew. There is no voting, no tribunal, no parliament and even no army that can disconnect those.”

He thanked Bokova and those ambassadors whose efforts had helped “to keep our holiest place, the Western Wall, out of any question or debate.”

Still Hacohen, like the Foreign Ministry, attacked the rest of the six-page resolution, which was very similar to a text the board adopted in April.

It solely accused Israel of aggressive actions in the Aksa Mosque compound and the Dome of the Rock, charging Jerusalem with igniting tensions on the ground.

The resolution stated that UNESCO “decries the continuous Israeli targeting of civilians including religious figures, sheikhs and priests, further decries the large number of arrests and injuries among Muslim worshipers and Jordanian Wakf guards in al-Aksa Mosque/ Al-Haram Al-Sharif by the Israeli forces and also urges Israel, the occupying power, to end these aggressions and abuses which inflame the tension on the ground and in between faiths.”

The UNESCO vote was held in the midst of a wave of terrorism, in which Palestinians have carried out over 30 attacks since October 1, in which 10 Israelis have been killed and more than 80 wounded.

Forty-eight Palestinians, have been killed, 24 who carried out attacks and another 24 in violent clashes with Israeli security forces in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Israel has blamed the unrest on false Palestinian charges that it is undermining the status quo on the Temple Mount.

Hacohen told the UNESCO board that resolutions such as theirs are very dangerous.

“Since last year we have been warning the executive board that the anti-Israeli decisions are part of a Palestinian incitement campaign that aims to inflame the already sensitive situation on the ground,” said Hacohen.

The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem added that the resolution was yet “another step in the continuous Palestinian endeavor to rewrite history.”

“The Palestinian leadership’s attempt to claim for themselves Jewish and Christian Holy Sites doesn’t bode well; suffice to look at the torching of Joseph’s Tomb by Palestinians just a few days ago,” it said.

The revised resolution took no steps to affirmatively reclassify the Western Wall. It referred, however, to the area of the Temple Mount solely by its Arabic names and omitted any historical Jewish link to what is Judaism’s holiest religious site.

The term Buraq Plaza remained elsewhere in the text and there was no mention or reference to the Western Wall.

It is the first time these Jewish names have been left out of Palestinian resolutions at UNESCO with regard to the Temple Mount.

The revised text took out any direct reference to east Jerusalem as the “occupied capital of Palestine,” but it did speak frequently of Israel as an “occupying power” in Jerusalem’s Old City.

The resolution also included a section of a text approved by the board in April, which said that the “Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi/Tomb of the Patriarchs” and the “Bilal Ibn Rabah mosque/Rachel’s Tomb” are an integral part of Palestine.