**National Post View: The anti-Israel virus that pervades the UN**

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In a secret ballot Wednesday, the United Nations cultural body, UNESCO,  voted to retain Jerusalem’s walled Old City area on the list of endangered world heritage sites.

Benign on its face, the resolution’s wording nonetheless betrays the underlying bias against Israel that pervades many UN entities. It identifies Judaism’s holiest  site, the Temple Mount — Har HaBayit in Hebrew, site of the twice-destroyed Temple — only by its Arabic name, Haram al-Sharif, the site of the Al-Aqsa mosque and the golden Dome of the Rock. The resolution also refers to Bethlehem’s Tomb of Rachel and Hebron’s Tomb of the Patriarchs — burial site of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (about as Jewishly “heritage” as it gets) — as “two Palestinian sites.”

Israel has understandably suspended cooperation with UNESCO — which claims its mission is to promote “intercultural understanding” and “build peace in the minds of men and women.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the resolution as an “absurdity, (which) harms not only the historical truth and the truth of the present, but also harms … the UN itself.”

The language of the resolution was drafted by the Palestinians who, since joining UNESCO in 2010, have put great energy into demonizing and delegitimizing Israel. Given the UN’s usual indifference to Israel’s moral claims, it is commendable that members of UNESCO and the UN leadership sought to distance themselves from the resolution. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon firmly upheld the Temple Mount’s status as “the holiest place in Judaism.” And in response to a denunciatory letter from Zionist Union lawmaker Tzipi Livni, UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova protested that, “such decisions are discussed and taken by the member states” and had nothing to do with her.

As we know from the phenomenon of Holocaust denial, in an increasingly relativistic, “post-fact” era, it has become possible for ideologues to seize on a strategy of emotive “narratives” that favour feelings — or, in this case, mass delusion — over objective truths. The film Denial, which recreates American historian Deborah Lipstadt’s ordeal in a British court facing notorious Holocaust denier David Irving, reminds us that even the most well-documented genocide in human history is not an impenetrable archival fortress; determined anti-Semites neither slumber nor sleep in their obsession to justify their hatred. Constant vigilance is called for — and, as the film also shows, appeasement of haters is never the right option.

There are 21 member countries on UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee. Ten of them voted for the resolution, two voted against and eight abstained, with one absent. Although one of 195 UNESCO associates, Canada is not a member of this committee. Nor are Israel or the U.S.: they suspended funding to UNESCO when the Palestinians were admitted, anticipating that an extension of the continuing assault on Israel and its existence was inevitable.

The Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has declared its determination to “re-engage” with the UN after a decade in which the Conservative government kept its distance. Trudeau insisted this would not involve dilution of Canada’s firm support for Israel. “Israel is a friend, Israel is an ally, Israel is a country that has values and an approach on many, many issues that are very much aligned with Canadian values,” he said, adding, “at the same time … we won’t hesitate from talking about unhelpful steps like the continued illegal settlements. We will point that out. We will continue to engage in a forthright and open way because that’s what people expect of Canada.”

Engaging in a “forthright and open” discussion of “unhelpful steps” would certainly include condemnation of a resolution as blatantly one-sided and biased as the one approved by UNESCO. Trudeau has recognized that “the double standard that’s often applied to Israel” does not help bring peace to the region, yet that very same double standard is what’s on display here.

Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion responded on Twitter, by saying that “Canada strongly rejects @UNESCO World Heritage Cmte for res. singling out #Israel & denying Judaism’s link to Old City + Western Wall. Old City important to 3 faiths – to deny one undermines integrity of site for all and the purpose of UNESCO.”

Is that the best Canada can do? If so, it undermines Trudeau’s claim that Israel will retain Canada’s strong support. It will take more than a pair of tweets to root out the anti-Israel virus that pervades the UN. Canada should make clear its determination to take concrete steps to destroy the hatred that lies behind it. One hundred and 40 characters is simply not enough.