Israel bemoans emerging Arab victory in UNESCO leadership vote

October 9, 2017

By [Raphael Ahren](https://www.timesofisrael.com/writers/raphael-ahren/) and [Tamar Pileggi](https://www.timesofisrael.com/writers/tamar-pileggi/)

The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-bemoans-emerging-arab-victory-in-unesco-leadership-vote/>

Carmel Shama-Hacohen, Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, the United Nations’ cultural agency, lamented the results of Monday’s first round of voting to elect a new leader for the cultural organization.

Former Qatari culture minister Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari received 19 of the 58 votes, with Egyptian diplomat Moushira Khattab coming in third place with 11 votes, behind French former culture minister Audrey Azoulay.

September 26, 2017 (Erez Lichtfeld)

Carmel Shama-Hacohen, Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, the United Nations’ cultural agency, lamented the results of Monday’s first round of voting to elect a new leader for the cultural organization.

Former Qatari culture minister Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari received 19 of the 58 votes, with Egyptian diplomat Moushira Khattab coming in third place with 11 votes, behind French former culture minister Audrey Azoulay.

[Get The Times of Israel's Daily Edition by email and never miss our top stories Free Sign Up](https://www.timesofisrael.com/signup/?utm_source=toi-articles&utm_medium=middle-link&utm_campaign=signup-buttons)

Shama-Hacohen told The Times of Israel the vote was “bad news for the organization and unfortunately also for Israel.”

However, he also stressed that “anything can happen” and that the first round doesn’t necessarily indicate who will win. He pointed out that current head Irina Bukova only won seven votes in the first round of voting when she was elected.

The results of Monday’s vote have no direct impact on the final outcome.

Delegates will continue to vote every day this week until one candidate receives a majority of votes. If, by the fourth round of voting, to be held on Thursday, no candidate has received a majority, only the top two candidates from that round of voting will be put forward for a final vote Friday.

Bukova’s tenure has been marred by funding troubles and tension over its inclusion of the Palestinians as members.

Israel and its staunch ally the United States have condemned UNESCO over what they say is an ingrained anti-Israel bias.

Intense diplomatic wrangling has marked the race among seven candidates to become the next director general of UNESCO. Arab countries have long wanted to lead the organization, though divisions over Palestinian membership have complicated their push.

UNESCO infuriated Israel and the US by granting full membership to Palestine in 2011.

Both countries suspended their funding to the agency — best known for its prestigious World Heritage List — over the move.

Most recently, the Paris-based body delighted Palestinians when it declared the Old City of Hebron in the West Bank an endangered world heritage site. It has also passed several resolutions ignoring Jewish ties to Jerusalem, drawing Israeli officials’ fury.

Israeli officials have stepped up lobbying at the world body in recent years, charging it with passing one-sided resolutions that obsessively target Israel. Bukova had also criticized anti-resolutions proposed by Arab states.