**Israel bashing is UNESCO’s drug of choice**

October 18, 2017

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Times of Israel

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/israel-bashing-is-unescos-drug-of-choice/>

As a lifelong Israeli diplomat, especially when at the United Nations, I took comfort in Churchill’s definition of success, of “going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm”.

But the past two weeks have yielded relative successes regarding UNESCO.

The United States announced its withdrawal from UNESCO, Israel followed suit, and the French candidate for director-general of the organisation won an unlikely election victory against candidates from Egypt and Qatar.

UNESCO, the United Nations Organisation for Education, Science and Culture, was founded in 1945 to bring nations together around liberal democratic values such as education, equality, science, press freedom and the preservation of world heritage sites. “Building peace in the minds of men and women,” proclaims its slogan.

Yet it often poisons minds with the politics of conflict, making peace further away. Anti-Israel obsession is a driving force of its hypocrisy and incompetence.

UNESCO’s Israel-bashing frequently distorts history. It declared Rachel’s Tomb a Palestinian Heritage site, without acknowledging its Jewish significance. Last Israeli Independence Day, it “celebrated” by stripping the Jewish people of any historical claim to Jerusalem.

It is a strange approach – an organisation ostensibly dedicated to world heritage airbrushes out of Jerusalem’s history the people who first built it. UNESCO has used its worthy mandate to strip Jews of our eternal bond to our homeland, to delegitimise our state.

To truly gauge the extent of the hostile takeover of UNESCO, look at how low the bar for success has fallen. We celebrated a victory of a candidate over an Egyptian who advocates Sharia law as the path to education and women’s rights, and over a Qatari who in an “uninterrupted” process would have had as much chance as Qatar winning an “uninterrupted” World Cup bid.

In a credible organisation such a victory should be a given. That it isn’t helps explain why the US and Israel took action.

The US has withdrawn from UNESCO before. In 1984, it felt it had been hijacked by the Soviets and other dictatorships to attack the west. Leaving the organisation is not about giving up on it, but reclaiming a stake in it. The US has effectively said: “If you break it, we won’t pay for it.”

UNESCO, like many UN agencies, is dangerously addicted to anti-Israel bias, its drug of choice. A narco-democracy, its members are in hoc to those who push the product most aggressively. I’ve come to think of it as ‘Pablo UNESCObar’.

But recent events give me some hope. Other countries could follow the US and Israel in demanding immediate reform at UNESCO and other international organisations.

More countries need to ask if the taxes paid by their hardworking citizens to fund these organisations is money well spent, or if they’re bankrolling institutions that undermine our interests

and values.

The UK has a chance to show real leadership. Earlier this year, it toughened its stance on the UN Human Rights Council. Now it could demand reform at UNESCO.

This isn’t about Israel. But western democratic states are paying through the nose only to get punched on the nose by those diametrically opposed to western, democratic values.

If the UK stands up against the hijacking of UNESCO, it could be an important step towards giving the world the international organisations it needs and deserves.