Jewish Group Urges UNESCO to Reject Palestinian Calls to Place Hebron on Danger List

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A leading American-Jewish organization has called the UN’s cultural body to reject Palestinian attempts to “hijack the agenda” of the upcoming World Heritage Committee meeting by seeking to designate the city of Hebron as a “World Heritage Site in Danger.”

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations released a statement on Thursday urging the director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to prevent such an outcome, calling Palestinians claim to the city, located in the West Bank and home to the Tomb of the Patriarchs (also known as Cave of the Patriarchs) as “replete with false information and baseless charges.”

The religious site is holy to both Judaism and Islam.

The organization’s chairman, Stephen M. Greenberg, and executive vice chairman/CEO, Malcolm Hoenlein, called on the UN body’s head, Irina Bokova “to assure that this scurrilous effort not be allowed to proceed.”

The World Heritage Committee is set to meet July 1 in Krakow, Poland.

In the statement, Greenberg and Hoenlein said it was imperative that the Palestinians’ “disruptive, diversionary tactics be repudiated,” and claimed their efforts were “motivated solely by political objectives and not a true concern for the status of the Cave of Patriachs or the old city of Hebron.”

They pointed out that Palestinian officials have repeatedly hailed the “cooperation of Israeli authorities responsible for the security of these holy sites in Hebron and public safety arrangements for worshippers at the Cave,” and Palestinian religious leaders “have publicly acknowledged Israeli respect for freedom of worship for all and expressed appreciation for the sensitivity shown by the Israeli authorities in responding to Palestinian special requests.”

“To succumb to this unwarranted call to designate the old city of Hebron as a ‘World Heritage Site in Danger’ would further denigrate the United Nations, diminish UNESCO and reinforce the irrational bias against Israel so common at the international body and its agencies,” they went on.

UNESCO has come under fire by Israel, the US and other nations for a series of moves deemed anti-Israel, most recently in May when its executive board [ratified a contentious resolution](http://www.timesofisrael.com/unesco-ratifies-contentious-resolution-denying-israeli-links-to-jerusalem/) denying any legal or historical Israeli links to Jerusalem and calling it an “occupying power” in its capital.

That resolution also criticized the Israeli government for archaeological projects in the capital and in Hebron and lambasted its naval blockade of the Gaza strip.

In the text, the agency wrote that Hebron (and Bethlehem) was an “integral part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” and that it “deplores the ongoing Israeli excavations, works, construction of private roads for settlers and of a Wall inside the Old City of Al-Khalil/Hebron which are illegal under international law and harmfully affect the authenticity and integrity of the site.”

Following the vote, Israel announced it would cut another $1 million from its payments to the UN, bringing the total cuts since December 2016 to $9 million.

In December, after the Security Council passed Resolution 2334, slamming Israeli settlement activity and calling settlements illegal, Netanyahu ordered $6 million cut from Israel’s payment to the UN. And in March, after the Human Rights Council passed five anti-Israel resolutions, Netanyahu vowed to cut an additional $2 million.