Facing US, Israeli pressure, Palestinians pull bid to join UN tourism body

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-tourism-body-to-vote-on-full-membership-for-palestinians/>

The Palestinians on Wednesday retracting their request for a vote on becoming a member state in the United Nations’ World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) amid American and Israeli pressure, a source in Jerusalem told The Times of Israel.

The vote, which was supposed to take place on Wednesday, was postponed until the organization’s next plenary session, in two years.

The Foreign Ministry welcomed the decision and said it was due to “great Israeli efforts spearheaded by [Tourism] Minister Yariv Levin, who led the Israeli delegation.”

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The PA submitted its request for membership in UNTWO in September 2016.

According to the agenda for UNTWO’s 22nd session, which began Monday in Chengdu, China, the PA was up for membership, along with the Union of the Comoros and the Federal Republic of Somalia.

To become a member, the Palestinians would have required a two-thirds majority vote.

When White House senior adviser Jared Kushner and his team met PA President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah last month, they reportedly asked the Palestinians for a three- to four-month grace period to present a peace plan. During that time, the Americans reportedly asked the Palestinians to refrain from their efforts to pursue recognition from international bodies.

The PA had remained silent on the planned vote, and on Wednesday, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Tourism Ministry did not respond to a request for a comment.

Had it voted in the Palestinians, the UNTWO would have become the second UN body to grant them the same status accorded to fully recognized states.

In a controversial move, the UN voted in 2011 to give the Palestinians full membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In response, both the US and Israel cut their funding to the UN body, which amounted to a quarter of its total budget.

The global Jewish organization B’nai B’rith slammed UNTWO’s decision to allow the Palestinians to vie for membership.

“The Palestinians must not be allowed to upend the international order, and enjoy treatment not afforded any other group, by being admitted to international organizations as a ‘state’ before they have actually earned that status,” B’nai B’rith said in a statement.

“Such admittance only encourages the Palestinians to continue rejecting the direct negotiations and meaningful compromise with Israel that would provide for the fundamental needs of both sides,” it concluded.