

April 19, 2016

Dear friends,

In response to UNESCO's Executive Board's decision on Palestine from last week (Executive Board 199th session on Occupied Palestine) we would like to say the following:

We regret that in this decision UNESCO has chosen to refer to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif only as "Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram-al-Sharif" and the Western Wall Plaza primarily as Al Buraq Plaza and using the "Western Wall Plaza" in quotes. In the political struggle over Jerusalem, names are often used as a means to erase the historical links between a people and a site. The bond between the Jewish people and the Temple Mount is one of the central defining themes in Jewish history. We regret that in attempting to redress the violations against the Palestinian and Muslim community by Israel, UNESCO ignores this bond and in so doing does itself a disservice by making it easy for Netanyahu to dismiss the resolution as a whole. Furthermore we believe that such one-sided language undermines UNESCO's role as an organization which aims at building peace through moral and intellectual solidarity.

There are many valid complaints in the executive board's decision - many of which we have been warning against - such as the construction of the Kedem Compound in Silwan/City of David and the Beit Haliba building approved for the Western Wall Plaza. But there are also areas of condemnation which we are hearing about for the first time. For example, the call on Israel to stop "planting fake Jewish graves" in Muslim cemeteries adjacent to the Haram al-Sharif. We are not aware of any such graves in these cemeteries. We are aware of fake graves in a different part of the Kidron area but as far as we know this is not a burial site for Muslims. We wonder about the accuracy of this charge. Regarding the clause calling on Israel to stop converting "many Islamic and Byzantine remains into the so-called Jewish ritual baths or into Jewish prayer spaces," the area where we know about synagogues that have been built in spaces dated to Muslim periods is within the Western Wall tunnels. We do share UNESCO's concerns that ancient sites are being converted into prayer areas and holy places.

In conclusion, we would like to express our support for UNESCO's decision to send a reactive monitoring mission for the Old City and its walls and regret that Israel has not

cooperated with this mission until now. We also fully support the Executive Board's request to appoint a permanent UNESCO representative for East Jerusalem and hope that such an appointment would help UNESCO overcome the factual deficiencies that sometimes characterized its resolutions on Jerusalem so that it can become a real force in protecting Jerusalem's heritage for all of humanity.

All the best,

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Executive Director
Emek Shaveh