Editorial: Good riddance to UNESCO

January 2, 2019

The Detroit News

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/editorials/2019/01/03/editorial-good-riddance-unesco/2461999002/>

As of the opening of the new year, the United States is no longer a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The Trump administration set the deadline for the withdrawal more than a year ago, ending a long and turbulent relationship between the U.S. and UNESCO, an organization charged with preserving world heritage sites and customs and the free flow of information of ideas.

Critics see the break as yet another example of President Donald Trump’s isolationist view of America’s place in the world. But breaking with UNESCO was the right thing to do; it has long been a corrupt and mismanaged organization, and in recent years has become an anti-Semitic one.

In leaving, Trump cited UNESCO’s hostility toward Israel, and its warm embrace of the tormentors of the Jewish state.

He is not the first president to turn his back on the organization. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan withdrew from UNESCO, citing corruption, mismanagement and a pro-Soviet bias. President George H.W. Bush directed the U.S. to rejoin in 1992, hoping it would foster better international cooperation.

It didn’t. The mismanagement of the organization, which the U.S. was dunned $80 million a year to support, continued.

President Barack Obama was forced to suspend funding to the organization in 2011 when it recognized Palestine as a state. A 1990s-era law bans the U.S. from funding any U.N. agency that recognizes Palestinian statehood.

The United States now owes roughly $500 million in back payments to UNESCO, a debt Trump has no intention of paying. Nor should he.

UNESCO fosters an extreme anti-Israel bias while putting its arms around some of the most inhumane regimes in the world.

Sudan, a genocidal regime, served on its governing body, and Syria, which has used chemical weapons against its own people, was allowed to a spot on its human rights committee.

But the primary indictment of UNESCO stems from its abuse of Israel, a key U.S. ally.

Between 2009 and 2014, the organization adopted 46 resolutions condemning Israel. No criticism was raised against such human rights violators as North Korea, China, Iran or Russia, and only one against Syria. Such one-sided distribution of human rights resolutions reflects an obsession with Israel rooted in hate.

Last summer, UNESCO passed a resolution which denies any Jewish ties to Jerusalem and designates the Temple Mount in the Old City as a Muslim religious site, with no reference to its significant place in Jewish history.

At any point over the past year, UNESCO could have moved to rid itself of corruption and mismanagement and restore a neutral balance to its mission. It chose not to.

So the withdrawal by the United States is not cause for bemoaning another broken international tie. Instead, it should be acknowledged as a necessary divorce from a wasteful and inept body that has become a force for hate rather than peace.

Other organizations within the United Nations should take note.