Israel Scrambles to Quash UNESCO Vote on Holy Sites

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<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4980915,00.html>

Israel is making efforts to quash or defeat a vote set to be held in the coming days by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which will include a clause stating that Israel is not the sovereign power over Jerusalem.

The resolution was submitted by Arab countries and will be voted upon by 21 nation representatives during the UN body’s World Heritage Committee when it meets July 2–12 in Krakow, Poland, for its annual assembly. Israel needs seven votes against in order to block the motion.

The clause about Jerusalem was a last-minute addition inserted into the resolution which already included the notion that the Cave of the Patriarchs will be recognized as a world heritage site.

The declarations within the resolution establishes an international acceptance that the Cave of the Patriarchs is a Palestinian Muslim site, setting the ground for a broader question of sovereignty and the historical right over a place that the Palestinians claim for themselves.

In the context of the peace process, a declaration of the resolution’s adoption would impose limits on Israeli construction, the protection and development of the site and on specific areas in the vicinity.

If the Cave of the Patriarchs is indeed recognized as a world heritage site therefore, Israel will be condemned each time it erects a security checkpoint or conducts work in the area on the grounds that is is damaging a world heritage site.

The site is a major tourist attraction and has long been on the Palestinian Authority’s list of priorities for claiming it as its own.

The wording of the proposal regarding Jerusalem is watered down when compared to that [voted upon last year](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4870632,00.html) when UNESCO's World Heritage Committee adopted a Palestinian-sponsored resolution which ignored the Jewish connection to the Temple Mount or the Western Wall.

Nevertheless, the text does still take an aggressive stance on Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, presents Israel and an occupying power and deems its decisions invalid.

In its first [move of disapproval](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4980750,00.html) of the vote, Israel has turned down a request by UNESCO to visit Hebron ahead of the upcoming vote by the organization to register the town's Old City as a Palestinian World Heritage Site.

"As a matter of principle, Israel will not provide legitimization to any Palestinian political move under the guise of culture and heritage," said Israel's ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama-Hacohen.

In May, [Italy was the first to announce](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4956344,00.html) it would not be voting in support of a UNESCO resolution which took place on Israel’s 69th Independence Day, denying Israel’s sovereignty over Jerusalem. A string of other nations followed suit including Greece, Great Britain, Germany, Lithuania and Holland.