

## **ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE**

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### ***The UN, UNESCO and Temple Mount in Jerusalem***

During the month of October, UNESCO (the cultural organization of the United Nations) has been dealing with the state of Temple Mount in Jerusalem as a historic site. In a recent resolution, by secret ballot, UNESCO approved a resolution that denied any Jewish connection to Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The document refers to the Jerusalem site that Jews call Temple Mount only by its Arab name—a significant semantic decision also adopted by UNESCO's Executive Board that triggered condemnation from Israel and its allies. The resolution was passed by the UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, which consists of 21 member countries: Ten countries voted for, two against, eight abstained and one was absent. (Neither Israel, the U.S. nor Palestine is on the World Heritage Committee.) The resolution, which accuses Israel of various violations, refers to Temple Mount solely by its Muslim names, "Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif," and defined it only as "a Muslim holy site of worship." As the site of the two biblical temples (i.e., the Solomon and Zerubbabel/Herod Temples), the Mount is the holiest place in Judaism. This resolution was actually the culmination of a series of UNESCO resolution proposals that began on 13 October concerning Old City of Jerusalem sites, including Temple Mount.

Coincidentally, at about the same time, the Israel Antiquities Authority produced a rare papyrus fragment from the seventh century BC, written in ancient Hebrew, that mentions Jerusalem by name. It is an ancient shipping document with these words: "From the king's maid-servant, from Na'arat, jars of wine, to Jerusalem." Na'arat is a place name mentioned in Joshua (16:7) and Jerusalem was the capital of the Kingdom of Judah during the seventh century BC (what Jews call the First Temple period). This ancient document proves the absurdity of the UNESCO resolution, which referred to Jerusalem solely in a Muslim context.

The attempt to deny any Jewish or Israeli claim to Temple Mount is part of a pattern rooted deep in history, which has also manifested itself in the modern period as well. For example, in the summer of 2000, President Bill Clinton of the United States summoned Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat to Camp David for the express purpose of negotiating a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After marathon negotiations, Barak agreed to recognize a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and give the Palestinian Authority (PA) about 95% of the West Bank, even agreeing to dismantle many Israeli settlements on the West Bank. He also agreed to allow up to 100,000 Palestinian refugees to return to Israel, which would also financially compensate other Palestinian refugees who had lost land when Israel was created in 1948. Amazingly, Barak also agreed to share sovereignty over Jerusalem with the PA.

Arafat's position evidenced no desire to compromise. He demanded the right of return of all Palestinian refugees to Israel. He demanded that Israel return to its pre-1967 borders and he insisted on total sovereignty over Jerusalem. During the negotiations, Arafat rejected any notion that Jerusalem had ever been the site of the Jewish Temple—"a modern invention," he insisted. In fact, Arafat personally banned Palestinian historians and archeologists from admitting that there had ever been a Jewish Temple on Temple Mount. The negotiations had failed! A typical Palestinian commentator placed this in a Palestinian historical context: "If time constitutes the [criteria of] existence, then Israel's temporary existence is only fifty-two years long while we, the Palestinian Arabs, have lived here for thousands of years, and we, the indigenous population, will eventually expel the invaders, however long it takes."

In addition, what has been occurring at UNESCO is part of a more pervasive pattern throughout the entire UN. Eugene Kontorovich of the Northwestern University School of Law and Penny Grunseid of the Kohelet Policy Forum recently documented the remarkable bias against Israel at the UN. Consider these pieces of evidence:

- The UN uses an entirely different rhetoric and set of legal concepts when dealing with Israel compared with situations of occupation or settlements worldwide. For example, Israel is referred to as the "Occupying Power" 530 times in UN General Assembly resolutions. Yet in seven major instances of past or present prolonged military occupation—Indonesia in East Timor, Turkey in northern Cyprus, Russia in areas of Georgia, Morocco in Western Sahara, Vietnam in Cambodia, Armenia in Azerbaijan, and Russia in Ukraine's Crimea—the number is zero. The UN has never called any of these countries an "Occupying Power."
- Since 1967, General Assembly resolutions have referred to Israeli-held territories as "occupied" 2,342 times, while the territories mentioned above are referred to as "occupied" a mere 16 times combined. The term appears in 90% of resolutions dealing with Israel, and only 14% of the much smaller number of resolutions dealing with all the other situations, "a difference that vastly surpasses the threshold of statistical significance."
- UN General Assembly resolutions employ the term "grave" to describe Israel's actions 513 times, as opposed to 14 total for all other conflicts, which involve the full gamut of human-rights abuses, including allegations of ethnic cleansing and torture. Verbs such as "condemn" and "deplore" are sprinkled into Israel-related resolutions tens more times than they are in resolutions about other conflicts, "setting a unique tone of disdain."

So, this is Israel in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century: A lethal enemy to its north (Hezbollah), with which it fought a deadly, but short conflict in 2006, and a terrorist state to its west (Hamas), which remains bent on its annihilation. Further to its north is Syria, which is currently engaged in a brutal civil war that could well lead to the dismemberment of Syria. And, of course to its east is Iran with its nuclear project. Israel likewise faces the chaos in the Arab world created by the

“Arab Spring,” and the persistent, ongoing Palestinian rejection of its legitimacy. This is Israel’s neighborhood, one in which it daily faces the issue of survival—the brutal reality of this amazing nation since it was founded in 1948. But in addition, Israel faces the UN and the persistent efforts of the General Assembly and UNESCO to deny Israel its legitimacy, its history and its uniqueness as a homeland for the Jewish people. And yet Israel and the Jewish people persist—a persistence that can only be explained by the sovereign, purposeful hand of Almighty God.

See Israel Kershner, “Israel Unveils Ancient Evidence in UN Feud,” in the *New York Times* (27 October 2016); Eugene Kontorovich and Penny Grunseid in the *Wall Street Journal* (14 September 2016); and James P. Eckman, *A Covenant People: Israel from Abraham to the Present*, pp. 323-324.