

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 19, 2015

The Honorable Crystal Nix-Hines
United States Ambassador to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
Organization
2, avenue Gabriel
75382 Paris, Cedex 08
France

Dear Ambassador Nix-Hines:

It has come to our attention that tomorrow the UNESCO Executive Board may consider a draft resolution asserting, among other things, that the Western Wall is part of al-Aqsa Mosque. As members of the United States Congress committed to promoting peace in Israel and the Palestinian territories through direct, bilateral negotiations aimed at achieving a two-state solution, we urge you to use the voice and vote of the United States to prevent this draft resolution from advancing.

The Palestinian draft – to be sponsored by the six Arab members on the Executive Board of UNESCO – also condemns Israel for measures taken by Israeli security forces following the recent escalation of violence in Israel and the West Bank, accuses Israel of violating the status quo on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and asserts that the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb are part of the alleged Palestinian state.

Over the past three weeks, appalling acts of terrorism have been committed by Palestinians against innocent Israeli citizens. While this upsurge of violence has been characterized as “lone wolf attacks,” the perpetrators have been influenced by the incitement of violence promoted by Palestinian leadership at the highest levels. The government of Israel has shown restraint in responding to the current crisis, but it cannot be expected to endure repeated attacks, some fatal, against its citizens.

As you know, the 1994 Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty reaffirmed Jordan's role in day-to-day administration of the Temple Mount. In accordance, Israel has insisted on the protection of religious freedom for all Muslim, Jewish, and Christian holy sites. Prime Minister Netanyahu has fervently and publicly committed to maintaining the status quo. Therefore, Palestinian leadership who falsely report violations of the status quo on the Temple Mount do so with the intent of fomenting hatred and inspiring violence.

Palestinian efforts to claim exclusive ownership of religious sites such as the Western Wall, the Cave of the Patriarchs, and Rachel's Tomb – and their denial of any Jewish claims to these sites, although Jews have prayed in them for thousands of years, reveal a central obstacle to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - Palestinian refusal to acknowledge the very existence of Jews in the ancient Jewish homeland.

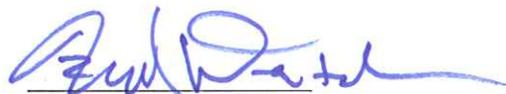
The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a political conflict between two peoples with competing national goals, and it should be addressed as such. By proactively working to morph it into a religious conflict – through actions such as the recent burning of Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus by Palestinian extremists and now the attempt to claim ownership over the Western Wall and other holy sites – the Palestinians are rendering the conflict all the more difficult to resolve.

We object to this proposed resolution and its potential ramifications on the already tenuous political reality in the region. We respectfully request that, as United States Ambassador to UNESCO, you use the influence of the United States to urge other Executive Board members not to adopt this resolution and to remove it from the agenda. We thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,



NITA M. LOWEY
Member of Congress



TED DEUTCH
Member of Congress

cc:

The Honorable Bathsheba Nell Crocker
Assistant Secretary, Bureau of International Organization Affairs