

U.S., Israel Offer Stern Rebukes Over UN's Hebron Decision

Following the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's decision to designate the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron as an endangered "Palestinian" cultural heritage site, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a very angry response.

"This time they decided that the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron is a Palestinian site, meaning that it is not Jewish, and that the site is in danger," he said. "Not a Jewish site?! Who is buried there? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah—our patriarchs and matriarchs!

"And the site is in danger? It is only in those places where Israel is, such as Hebron, that freedom of religion for all is ensured."

He announced Friday he has ordered a \$1 million cut in Israel's annual United Nations dues. According to the Prime Minister's Office, the \$1 million will be transferred to fund the establishment of a Jewish heritage museum in Hebron and Kiryat Arba as well as additional heritage projects related to Hebron.

This is the fourth time in the past seven months that Israel has cut funding to the UN. The previous three cuts were:

- in May, Netanyahu ordered a \$1 million cut in dues over the UNESCO resolution that questioned Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem
- in March, he cut \$2 million over anti-Israel resolutions adopted by the UN Human Rights Council
- after last December's adoption of Security Council

Resolution 2334, he cut \$6 million in dues payments to the UN.

The U.S. has already withdrawn its support for UNESCO, and as a result, no longer has any voting rights. That move came after the organization added the Palestinian Authority to its membership. U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Amb. Nikki Haley said she is reviewing what additional options the U.S. could take in response to this latest attack on Israel.

“The UNESCO vote on Hebron is tragic on several levels,” she said in a statement Friday afternoon. “It represents an affront to history. It undermines the trust that is needed for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process to be successful. And it further discredits an already highly questionable UN agency. Today’s vote does no one any good and causes much harm.”

During Sunday’s cabinet meeting, Netanyahu reaffirmed his decision to redirect the UN funding. He also said funding would go toward finalizing plans to construct the Kedem Center for tourists in eastern Jerusalem, outside the Old City.

“Today I have instructed that procedures be completed for the construction of the Kedem Center for displaying the historical and archaeological findings for the City of David,” he said. “This will be an impressive structure with extensive displays. The entire world will see the truth, and the first visitors whom I will invite there will be UNESCO and UN delegations.”
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JNS contributed to this report.