

# U.S. pulls out of UNESCO accusing it of 'anti-Israel bias'

The U.S. earlier had once withdrawn from the UNESCO, in 1984, accusing it of favoring the Soviet Union, and rejoined the U.N. body in 2002.

The United States on October 12 announced its withdrawal from the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), accusing it of "continuing anti-Israel bias". UNESCO is the first U.N. agency that has admitted Palestine as a full member, in 2011. As required by law, the U.S. has stopped funding the UNESCO since then. The U.S. withdrawal will take effect on December 31, 2018 and until then it will remain a full member of the body.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson notified UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova on the morning of October 12 of the U.S. decision. "This is a loss to UNESCO. This is a loss to the United Nations family. This is a loss for multilateralism," Ms. Bokova said in a statement.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert said the U.S. would seek to establish a permanent observer mission to UNESCO. "This decision was not taken lightly, and reflects U.S. concerns with mounting arrears at UNESCO, the need for fundamental reform in the organisation, and continuing anti-Israel bias at UNESCO," she said in a statement. "The United States indicated to the Director-General its desire to remain engaged with UNESCO as a non-member observer state in order to contribute U.S. views, perspectives and expertise on some of the important issues undertaken by the organisation, including the protection of world heritage, advocating for press freedoms, and promoting scientific collaboration and education," she said.

U.S. laws bar funding to any U.N. agency that recognises the Palestinian state. Ms. Bokova said, "Despite the withholding of funding, since 2011, we have deepened the partnership between the United States and UNESCO, which has never been so meaningful." In a lengthy statement exceeding more than 1,000 words, the UNESCO chief underscored that the mission of the body is consonance with the "values of the people of America", and listed a series of initiatives it has taken to combat anti-semitism. "Together, we have worked to protect humanity's shared cultural heritage in the face of terrorist attacks and to prevent violent extremism through education and media literacy... This is why I regret the withdrawal of the United States," she said.

The U.S. had earlier once withdrawn from the UNESCO, in 1984, under President Ronald Regan who accused it of favoring the Soviet Union. Under President George W. Bush, Washington rejoined the organisation in 2002.

Israel and UNESCO have a contentious relationship, and Israel recalled its ambassador to UNESCO in 2016, accusing it of ignoring Jewish views of the heritage of the region. In a stinging attack on the world body in September, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu explained to the U.N. General Assembly the Israeli view on a recent UNESCO decision that triggered the U.S. withdrawal from it. "So is there no limit to the U.N.'s absurdities when it comes to Israel? Well, apparently not. Because in July, UNESCO declared the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron a Palestinian World Heritage Site. That's worse than fake news; that's fake history. Mind you, it's true that Abraham, the father of both Ishmael and Isaac, is buried there, but so, too, are Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca – Sarah's a Jewish name, by the way – and Leah, who just happened to be patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people. Well, you won't read about that in the latest UNESCO report, but if you want to, you can read about it in a somewhat weightier publication. It's called 'the Bible'. I highly recommend it. I

hear it even got four and a half out of five stars on Amazon. And it's a great read. I read it every week," he had said.

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