

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 26, 2016

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express grave concern about continuing efforts by member states of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to delegitimize Israel. Today, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee adopted "Old City of Jerusalem and Its Walls," another resolution that denies any historical connections of Jews and Christians to Jerusalem's holiest sites, including the Temple Mount and the Western Wall. Authored by Palestinian and Jordanian delegations and submitted by Kuwait, Lebanon and Tunisia, this inflammatory resolution also repeatedly describes Israel as "the Occupying Power." Given that U.S. law already forbids American taxpayer money from going to UNESCO, we urge your administration to join Israel in suspending ties to UNESCO.


In October 2011, after UNESCO admitted the non-state actor of "Palestine" as a member, the United States withheld funding from UNESCO pursuant to U.S. law. Under U.S. laws passed in 1990 and 1994, your administration is required to withhold funding to any United Nations organization that grants membership to the Palestine Liberation Organization or "any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood." UNESCO's acceptance of "Palestine" as a member state undermines the core tenant of U.S. policy in the region, which mandates direct negotiations as the only solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

As you know, UNESCO's Executive Board voted on October 13, 2016, to adopt "Item 25: Occupied Palestine," an inflammatory, anti-Israel resolution authored by the Palestinian delegation and submitted by Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, and Sudan. Both this resolution and the UNESCO World Heritage Committee's resolution are deeply divisive and further damage UNESCO's credibility. They also set back the prospects of a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We are further disturbed that several U.S. allies in UNESCO voted in favor of these and other recent resolutions rooted in ignorance and bigotry.

At a time when the Middle East is in turmoil and historical heritage sites are being destroyed by groups such as ISIS, it is imperative that the U.S. stands with Israel, our closest ally and the sole democracy in the region. Recent UNESCO resolutions that deny Jewish and Christian ties to holy sites in Jerusalem not only reinforce the necessity of withholding American funding from this counterproductive U.N. organization, but also call into question future U.S. membership in UNESCO.

In 1984, the U.S. severed ties with UNESCO due to disparities between American foreign policy goals and UNESCO's agenda. Because UNESCO continues to deviate from its founding mission and adopt one-sided, anti-Israel resolutions, it is time for the U.S. to stand with Israel and suspend our ties with UNESCO.

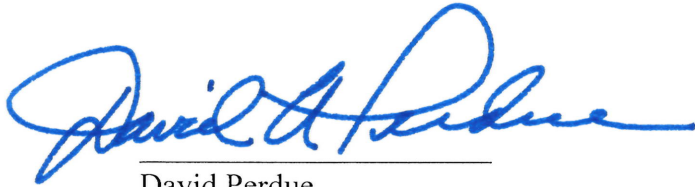
Sincerely,

A blue ink handwritten signature of Marco Rubio, consisting of stylized initials 'MR' followed by a horizontal line.

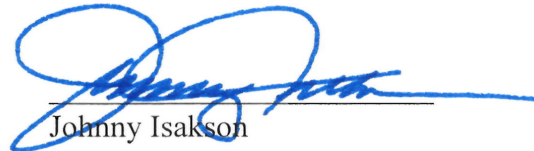
Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator

A blue ink handwritten signature of Mark Kirk, written in a cursive style.

Mark Kirk  
U.S. Senator

A blue ink handwritten signature of David Perdue, written in a cursive style.

David Perdue  
U.S. Senator

A blue ink handwritten signature of Johnny Isakson, written in a cursive style.

Johnny Isakson  
U.S. Senator