



الحملة الألفية للحفاظ على
مقبرة مأمّن الله المقدسية
Campaign to Preserve
Mamilla Jerusalem Cemetery

February 12, 2012

Irina Bokova
Director-General
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France

Dear Director-General Bokova,

Since we submitted our Petition to you two years ago this February regarding the destruction of the historically, culturally and religiously important Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem, we regret that UNESCO has taken no action in response, other than assurances that UNESCO would pursue “dialogue” between the parties on this matter. We presume such efforts at dialogue have been ineffective, as the building of a “Museum of Tolerance” on this ancient cemetery has resumed recently, while new construction work on the site by the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem threatens to expand the scope of this aggression. We urgently request UNESCO to demand publicly that Israel desist from this archaeological crime and desecration of Palestinian and Muslim cultural and religious rights.

We were struck that in contrast to UNESCO’s acquiescence in these repeated violations by Israel, you recently undertook to inspect personally the site of vandalized ancient tombs of Sufi saints in Timbuktu, Mali. Indeed you were so disturbed by the destruction that you promised on the spot to “reconstruct the mausoleums as soon as possible.” You also reaffirmed the significance of such sanctified sites to the descendants of the interred, asserting that reconstruction of the desecrated tombs “is important for the future of the Malian people, their dignity and their pride...If you let this disappear, it would be a crime against all of humanity.”

In this same spirit, we invite you to inspect the site of the equally ancient, no less venerated Mamilla Cemetery in the Holy City of Jerusalem, desecrated not by the ravages of war but by the bulldozers of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Municipality of Jerusalem. There you will also find the tombs and bones of saints, scholars, princes and everyman and everywoman, which are even today being unearthed in the inexorable path of Israeli bulldozers as these human rights violations and the desecration of an ancient cultural site persist. We attach photos of the most recent construction work in the cemetery for your information.

February 12, 2013

Page 2 of 2

As we have emphasized in our previous correspondence, if this “Museum of Tolerance” is allowed to be completed, it will only confirm the existing perception that the international community is complicit in Israel’s actions to impose a *fait accompli* in the Holy City of Jerusalem. Moreover, allowing such blatant and unabashed desecration of Palestinian and Islamic religious and cultural heritage sites will further embolden those already trying to erase the Palestinian presence in the Holy Land, and will ultimately work to prevent a permanent peaceful solution to the conflict as a whole.

As part of your ongoing dialogue with Israeli officials, we would highly appreciate your urgent attention to this matter in line with your responsibility to protect and preserve cultural heritage in the whole of the City of Jerusalem.

Indeed, just as you ascribe to Timbuktu part of the greatness of Mali, so is Mamilla part of the “record of the golden ages” of Jerusalem and Islam. We are confident that you would agree that if we let Mamilla disappear, it would be another crime against all humanity.

Sincerely,



Maria C. LaHood
Center for Constitutional Rights
666 Broadway, 7th Floor
New York, New York 10012



Rashid I. Khalidi
Campaign to Preserve Mamilla Jerusalem Cemetery
Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies
Columbia University, New York

cc:

Mr. Francesco Bandarin, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture
H.E. Mr. Elias Sanbar, Permanent Delegate of the State of Palestine to UNESCO
H.E. Mrs. Dina Kawar, Permanent Delegate of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO
H.E. Dr. Nassif Hitti, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to UNESCO
Dr. Selima Dalibey, Liaison Officer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to UNESCO
Mrs. Samia Diacta, Liaison Officer for the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Permanent Observer Mission to UNESCO