



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

February 6, 2014

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

Dear Director-General Bokova,

You will recall the Petition submitted to you four years ago on behalf of 60 Jerusalemites representing a number of the Holy City's oldest families regarding the destruction of the Ma'man Allah (Mamilla) Muslim Cemetery in Jerusalem, which has historical, cultural, archeological and religious significance. We have repeatedly brought to your attention the ongoing construction by the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) of the so-called "Center for Human Dignity-Museum of Tolerance" on this ancient site that served as a Muslim cemetery until the recent past. Since our last communication a year ago, new construction work has been planned on the site by the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem which threatens to expand the scope of this desecration. In addition to the Petition, we have also transmitted to your office letters protesting this project signed by 80 international archeologists and another addressed to you by 20 Jerusalem community leaders.

The only response of UNESCO to these violations has been to point out to us that its mandate in Jerusalem is limited to the designated World Heritage site of the Old City within its Walls, but that UNESCO nevertheless seeks to promote dialogue to ensure respect for the cultural heritage of Jerusalem. Although your Deputy has assured us that our concerns were relayed to the Israeli authorities, UNESCO has not demonstrated its considerable prestige and influence in the context of its global mandates in an effort to persuade the Israeli authorities and the SWC to desist from destroying an important cultural heritage site.

This imbalance is regrettably aggravated by UNESCO's recently publicized agreement to organize a joint exhibition prepared by the very same SWC that is responsible for this ongoing desecration, sponsored by Israel, Canada and Montenegro. Despite the opposition to this exhibition voiced by UNESCO Member States, we understand that you have agreed that the exhibition shall be rescheduled for June 2014.

We fully appreciate the established practice for UN Member States to organize and sponsor exhibits in official United Nations or specialized agencies' headquarters on any theme they wish. However, we fail to understand what could have compelled UNESCO to partner with the SWC

on such an exhibit, the same private institution that has shamelessly continued to pursue the eradication of Mamilla cemetery, as has been demonstrated through the copious documentation we have provided to your office over the past four years.

We can only conclude that instead of defending cultural heritage rights, or at least opting for impartiality or silence in a case where UNESCO pleads that action is outside its mandate, you have provided a platform to a party engaged in the desecration of an ancient historic, cultural and religious site, in spite of the persistent objection of Palestinians whose ancestors are buried there. In giving the UNESCO seal of approval to a partnership with the SWC, UNESCO appears oblivious to the serious cultural and archeological crimes in Mamilla, which the SWC proudly and cynically parades under a false banner of cultural tolerance and human dignity.

This impropriety is compounded by the fact that the SWC's exhibit suppresses Islamic and Arab elements in the rich tapestry of Jerusalem's history. The SWC's destruction and desecration of Mamilla cemetery fulfills this purpose as well, by physically erasing an important part of the city and its inhabitants' cultural heritage.

We respectfully request you to reconsider this unjustifiable collaboration with the SWC, and to devote the resources and prestige of UNESCO to preserving the cultural and archeological heritage of the entire Holy City of Jerusalem. Your efforts to prevail upon the Israeli authorities and the SWC to halt further construction in the Mamilla Cemetery as a way to promote real peace, tolerance and human dignity in the Holy City of Jerusalem would be highly appreciated. The impact on Palestinian, Arab and Muslim people to the destruction of this ancient cemetery and the building the Museum of Tolerance, on the other hand, would be distressing and counterproductive, something which we strive to prevent through our requests to your esteemed office for intensive diplomatic efforts in this regard.

Sincerely,



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cc: Mr. Francesco Bandarin, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture
H.E. Mr. Elias Sanbar, Permanent Representative of the State of Palestine to UNESCO
Ms. Rima Al Bakheet, Deputy Permanent Delegate, Cultural Attaché, of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to UNESCO
H.E. Mr. Abdullah Alneaimi, Chairman of the Arab Group, UNESCO
H.E. Mr. Mohamed Sameh Amr, Chairman of the Islamic Group, UNESCO