Beat: News

UNESCO vote on Jerusalem site angers Israel

Jerusalem

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USPA NEWS - UNESCO member states have renewed a resolution criticising Israel for restricting Muslim access to a Jerusalem holy site, a European diplomatic source said, angering Israel's government by also referring to the area only by its Muslim names.

The site is revered by Jews and Muslims alike, known to Jews as Temple Mount and to Muslims as the al-Aqsa compound or Haram al-Sharif.

But a draft of the latest version of the resolution, posted on UNESCO's website and dated Oct 12, showed the site repeatedly described only by its Muslim names - something Israel says amounts to a denial of its Jewish history.
"The theatre of the absurd at UNESCO continues and today the organisation adopted another delusional decision which says that the people of Israel have no connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in Jerusalem after the decision.

The resolution, which is renewed periodically, condemns Israel for restricting Muslims access to the site, and for aggression by police and soldiers.

"To declare that Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall is like saying that China has no connection to the Great Wall of China or that Egypt has no connection to the Pyramids," Netanyahu said.

Nabil Abu Rdainah, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said: "This is an important message to Israel that it must end its occupation and recognise the Palestinian state and Jerusalem as its capital with its sacred Muslim and Christian sites."

The resolution was voted through on Thursday with 24 votes in favour, six against, and 26 abstentions with two countries absent, the diplomatic source and another source with knowledge of the vote said on Thursday.

France, which is trying to bring the Israeli and Palestinians leaders back to the negotiating table by year-end, was among countries voting in favour of the resolution on a previous occasion, a move that caused a diplomatic row with the Israeli government.

Earlier this year, President Francois Hollande said there had been an "unfortunate," amendment to the text on that occasion and that he would be "extremely vigilant" with this year's resolution.

Paris abstained this time round, the diplomat said.

(Reporting by John Irish, and Ori Lewis in Jerusalem, additional reporting by Nidal al-Mughrabi in Gaza; Writing by Andrew Callus; Editing by Dominic Evans)

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