Will Iran chair the next UNESCO Executive Board?

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A diplomatic battle is under way to prevent Iran’s election to the post of UNESCO Executive Board chairman to replace Michael Worbs of Germany.

Israel has had a contentious relationship with the 58-member board, which in the past has approved resolutions that some say have ignored Jewish ties to Judaim's holiest site, the Temple Mount.

US and Israeli efforts to block Iran received a boost on Wednesday when the Philippines was one of 27 countries the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s General Assembly elected to a four-year term on the board, effective immediately. Some of those countries are serving their second four-year terms.

In advance of the November 16 election, the board has been split between choosing Iran or South Korea to head the board, but it is possible that the Asia Pacific group will push the Philippines ambassador as a compromise candidate, a diplomatic source speculated in a conversation with The Jerusalem Post.

But the overall make-up of the board with the new members is seen as more hostile to Israel than the previous one.

Germany and the Netherlands lost seats and Turkey gained one. Jordan joined Egypt on the board, thereby providing additional support to any anti-Israel resolutions regarding Jerusalem in the future.

The US has already informed UNESCO that it [plans to leave the organization](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Protesting-anti-Israel-bias-US-plans-withdrawal-from-UNESCO-507271). In a statement to the media it cited, among other things, the organization’s biased treatment of Israel. The US departure is not expected to take place until the end of 2018, and it is presumed that if UNESCO takes steps to reform, the US could change its mind.

Since the US’s statement, the UNESCO Executive Board has delayed its traditional anti-Israel resolution. In another unusual move, the UNESCO General Assembly, which is meeting in Paris from October 30 to November 14, has not passed an anti-Israel resolution. However, two toned-down texts on Israel were approved as part of a general bundle of resolutions through sidebar committees.
Israel has said it would follow the US in leaving the organization but has not yet formally notified UNESCO.

“There is no doubt that these [election] results do not constitute an incentive for Israel to decide differently from the United States,” Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama Hacohen said on Wednesday.

In a speech to the UNESCO General Assembly on Friday, Shama Hacohen said, “UNESCO has been hijacked and abused as a tool for the persecution of Israel and the Jewish people, while concocting fake facts and fake history, meant to erase our history in Jerusalem and rewrite global history.”