October 19, 2016

H.E. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York

Via email

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

We write to welcome, but also to urgently bring to your attention an issue concerning, your October 14th statement, delivered by your spokesperson, "on the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls." In light of Jerusalem's obvious sacredness to multiple faith communities, and the need to signal principled opposition to the politicization of United Nations bodies as part of efforts to obscure that fact, we appreciated in particular your acknowledgment that any "undertaking to repudiate the undeniable common reverence for these sites does not serve the interests of peace and will only feed violence and radicalism."

This said, your statement repeated a very significant error: the assertion that the "Western Wall is the holiest place in Judaism," when unquestionably the single holiest place in Judaism is and always has been the Temple Mount.

The extraordinary religious and historical importance of the Western Wall as a place of prayer for Jews is founded solely upon its status as the remnant of the ancient Temple Mount complex that is the very heart of Jewish civilization across time -- the site toward which Jews around the world have prayed for thousands of years. (Incidentally, the Mount of Olives, which you only noted "is revered by Christians," is also revered by Jews in light of its proximity to the Temple Mount; its expansive Jewish cemetery is the most important in the world, and one of the single largest and oldest anywhere.) Misrepresenting, however unintentionally, this critical truth, in an official statement on the very subject to which it relates, risks overshadowing the value of the statement itself and linking your name to the negation of the fundamental, age-old Jewish tenets that first bestowed upon Jerusalem and its Temple Mount their special place in the heritage of humanity. Accordingly, not least as UNESCO will continue to deliberate related matters over the coming days, we appeal to you to issue a clarifying correction of your original statement.

Mr. Secretary-General, it goes without saying that we, along with countless Jewish and Christian communities and others worldwide, greeted with outrage the latest provocative, a historical and ultimately anti-Semitic resolution that was passed by the UNESCO Executive Board on Jerusalem yesterday. This sort of resolution not only promotes conflict rather than peace and derails and discredits UNESCO, along with all those governments and individuals enabling or
tolerating the motion, but it also actually makes the UN complicit in a devastating assault on history and a people's basic identity. Those supporting this type of resolution have revealed themselves to be not only critical of any particular Israeli policy but hostile to Judaism and Jewry; all responsible actors in the international community need to understand that irrespective of their positions on political issues in the Middle East, this vile historical revisionism must be opposed clearly and forcefully.

Ironically, the revisionism persists just as Jews now celebrate one of the three major yearly festivals when the Jewish people would collectively ascend in pilgrimage to the Temple Mount during ancient times.

Those more concerned with erasing the history of Jews than with building genuine coexistence, Mr. Secretary-General, have showed that they will sink deeper and deeper into overt anti-Semitism, importing this corrosive bigotry into major international organizations. The stakes, then, simply could not be higher. Where once global outrage was forced to battle to revoke the lie propounded at the United Nations that Zionism is a form of racism, now people of decency may be obliged to struggle to rescind UNESCO declarations that deny the centrality of Jerusalem to Jews. We hope you will ensure that you will be known for an unambiguous and impactful leadership role at this vital moment. To this end, we ask you to move quickly to correct what was identified in your name last week as the holiest place in Judaism.

Sincerely,

Gary P. Saltzman, President
Daniel S. Mariaschin, Executive Vice President and CEO
David J. Michaels, Director of UN and Intercommunal Affairs