

PRESS RELEASE

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UNESCO D.G. Meets Jews from Arab Countries

"Something Very Wrong Is Happening In This World"

(Paris - June 12, 2014) In an unprecedented meeting with Irina Bokova, UNESCO's Director General, Jews from seven Arab countries expressed their concern about endangered Jewish holy sites throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region.

A joint delegation of ***Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC)*** and le ***Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France (CRIF),*** submitted up-to-date reports on the dire status of Jewish holy sites remaining in Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen as well as recognizing some positive developments in Morocco and Tunisia..

Participants underscored "the sad reality" that throughout the region, sites holy to all faiths – Jews, Christians and Muslims alike – are at risk of being destroyed by the ravages of war and religious intolerance.

In response, Ms Bokova, similarly expressed her concern about the "destruction of sites holy to Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and others", stating: "Something very wrong is happening in this world" she said.

This meeting followed Ms. Bokova's May 28, 2014 statement expressing her "dismay at the destruction of the historical synagogue of Eliyahu Hanabi in Damascus" and her call "on all parties to halt immediately the destruction of Syrian heritage". She re-iterated in the meeting that the destruction of this 400 year old synagogue is "not acceptable".

To combat this assault on history and heritage, ***JJAC*** and ***CRIF*** called upon UNESCO to convene a multi-faith Commission of experts to document, and report on the status of heritage sites holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims that are at risk throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region.

“Who but UNESCO should be the appropriate world body to take on this responsibility?” asked Rabbi Elie Abadie, Co-President of ***Justice for Jews from Arab Countries.*** “The creation of such a multi-faith Commission can, and must, contribute to the protection and preservation of the historic heritage of Jews from Arab countries”.

Roger Cukierman, President of the ***Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France*** stressed that it is “ important, for all of humanity, for a world body like UNESCO, to investigate and draw some conclusions about the destruction of holy sites – for Jews and non-Jews alike.

Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC) is an international coalition of Jewish communities and organizations whose aim is to secure rights and redress for Jews displaced from Arab countries, as a matter of law and equity. (www.justiceforjews.com).

The ***Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France*** is the political representative body of the organized Jewish community and its spokesman. ***CRIF***’s mission is to fight against all forms of anti-Semitism, racism, intolerance and exclusion, and to defend human rights.

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