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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0529**

HENRY A. WAXMAN  
29TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

July 9, 2001

Koichiro Matsuura  
Director-General  
United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organizations  
VIA FACSIMILE

Dear Director-General Matsuura,

I am writing to express deep concern about the deliberate destruction of antiquities on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by the Waqf, the Muslim religious trust charged with maintaining the area.

Over the past months, the Waqf has overseen large-scale excavations around the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque involving indiscriminate digging and the removal and dumping of countless archeological artifacts dating back to the periods of the First and Second Jewish Temples, built by King Solomon and King Herod.

In the area known as "Solomon's Stables," reports indicate that the Waqf permitted unsupervised construction crews to bulldoze a hole more than 50 meters long, 25 meters wide, and 12 meters deep before removing more than 1,500 tons of earth full of shattered archeological artifacts to the Kidron Valley garbage dump. Other devastating Waqf plans include paving over the northeastern parts of the Temple Mount near the "Mercy Gate," which would obstruct any future archeological exploration from taking place in the underlying area. Furthermore, the Israeli Antiquities Authority has been repeatedly denied access to the sites.

In 1982, Jerusalem was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Danger because of urban development and general deterioration. Nearly twenty years later, the wanton use of heavy machinery, tractors, jack-hammers, and stone cutters is catastrophic to the delicate artifacts, architecture, and historical integrity of the place considered the crossroads of world religion.

As you know, UNESCO's 1956 New Delhi Recommendations on International Principles Applicable to Archeological Excavations stress that international cooperation in archeological research fosters mutual understanding between nations, and that the international community as a whole benefits from discoveries. On the contrary, the unilateral actions by the Waqf to remove and ruin artifacts are a calculated attempt to deny all Judeo-Christian roots in Jerusalem, and an affront to Jews, Christians, archeologists, and communities worldwide.

I therefore find it troubling that the Palestinian Authority would be invited by UNESCO and ICOMOS to co-host the September 2001 International Millennium Congress on Two Thousand Years in the History of Architecture. It is precisely this type of one-sided approach that is the primary obstacle for the United States to ever seriously consider rejoining UNESCO. UNESCO and ICOMOS should be leading the international community in boldly condemning the sabotage and destruction of archeological sites instead of endorsing an entity that is supporting the Waqf's violations.

Just as in the case of the Taliban's destruction of Buddhist heritage in Afghanistan, the international community must speak out against the decimation of cultural and religious antiquities on the Temple Mount. I urge you to act swiftly in investigating these activities and highlight this issue at the upcoming conference.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

  
HENRY A. WAXMAN  
Member of Congress