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Years ago, UNESCO was established with the noble goal to facilitate cultural exchange and mutual understanding among the countries in the world in order to establish peace and harmony. Article 1 of its constitution boldly states: *“The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.”*

Unfortunately, today the reality is quite different. By betraying its original principles, UNESCO has turned into a tool of imposing the political agenda of its most aggressive members through distortion of the very same cultural issues that it was supposed to protect. Recently, we witnessed a new development in that disturbing trend that affected two of its outstanding members - Israel and Japan. What UNESCO does by misinterpreting cultural issues that concern those two countries is far from creating mutual respect and peace. It creates animosity and confrontation.

The recent resolution to strip Israel and the Jews of their heritage in Jerusalem is disturbing. It declared Temple Mount and the Western Wall Arab Muslim heritage sites. Over 3,000 years of Jewish history were wiped out with a simple vote. The People’s Republic of China was one of the countries that voted for the resolution. If UNESCO was guided by science and objectivity, it would have noticed the extensive archaeological, historical and Biblical evidence that links Jews with that part of Jerusalem. Temple Mount was the place where the First and the Second Temples once stood. One of the remaining walls of the Second Temple still is the most revered place of worship in Judaism, visited every year by millions of people.

It is a sign of utmost cynicism to deny the connection of the Jews with Temple Mount. At the same time, the arguments of the group, which sponsored that anti-Jewish resolution, are beyond questionable. The only link of Islam with the area was the “vision” of its founder, in which he was miraculously transported there, without ever actually visiting the place. If the Koran is used to establish that connection, then the Biblical evidence has much more credibility because it shows the actual Jewish presence in more details, which are confirmed historically.

As it is the case in many areas in the world, a decision that affects the interpretation of old historical facts often has tangible negative consequences. The denial of the Jewish heritage by an international organization emboldens various Arab extremist groups, which see it as a justification for their murderous activities.

People and organizations that hold such views are often hypocritical. On one hand, they promote views that harm the actual Jews, while on the other hand they do not shy away from exploiting past Jewish suffering to promote just as vigorously their political agenda. The event,

most frequently used for that purpose, is the Holocaust. The Temple Mount resolution, adopted with the majority of the Muslim members and their supporters, was just the first blow against Israel.

A second blow was delivered in a document against Japan, concerning the so-called “comfort women”, which alleges that between 80,000 and 200,000 Asian women (the presenters are unable to provide a definitive number) have been forced into sex slavery by the Japanese government during World War II. This was stated in the Nomination Form for presenting documents as part of UNESCO’s International Memory of the World Register, under the name “Voices of the ‘Comfort Women’”. Among other things, the nominators stated in section 5.2:

*“The ‘comfort woman’ system, which has become recognized through the gradual accumulation of fragments of evidence, is a wartime tragedy comparable to the Holocaust and the Cambodian genocide, not in terms of the numbers of victims, but in terms of the depth of the victims’ suffering and their enduring humiliation.”*

An examination of the facts will clarify the validity of the statement, but even before going there, it is clear how the Holocaust has been exploited irresponsibly. Those who use it here distort and denigrate its meaning. There have been many interpretations of that unique catastrophe that befell on the Jews, but the concise remarks by Eli Cohen, former Israeli Ambassador to Japan, in a letter to a Japanese journalist, summarize the problem quite well: *“There was no comparison to the Holocaust. No nation in the world planned with cold heart how to murder a nation systematically. Jewish kids, women, men, even if they were only partially Jewish, like only mother or only father or even if you grandmother or grandfather was a Jew. They built a system to look for every Jew wherever he is and just murder him/her. And the whole German nation was involved. It continued for years when nations like Poland, Austria, Italy and others cooperated in this massacre and only few brave people were ready to help Jewish people and risked their lives to hide or save miserable escaping Jewish people all over Europe. This never happened in the history of human kind and I hope it will never happen with no other nation.”*

For the record, Japan didn’t cooperate in that massacre. On the contrary, it helped Jews. At the San Remo Conference in 1920, Japan co-signed the resolution to create the “Mandate for Palestine” that paved the road to *“the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”*. Shortly before World War II, Japan promoted the idea of creating a Jewish state on its territories (the so-called Fugu Plan) which didn’t materialize due to the resistance of the Jewish leadership in the USA. Still, Japan managed to save thousands of Jews. Best known is the case of Chiune Sugihara, the Ambassador of Japan to Lithuania, who issued transit visas to about 6,000 Jews. After they arrived in Japan, their visas were periodically renewed by the Japanese government. Japan also hosted thousands of Jews in some of the occupied territories, notably Shanghai, despite the fierce objections of Hitler’s regime.

Still, the war record of Japan is a sensitive issue, but when talking about the past, especially when someone is accused, facts are more important than emotions. Considering that point, it is necessary to take into account the facts to determine whether the “comfort women” case equals the Holocaust.

The actions of Japan in the occupied countries were thoroughly investigated after the war. The guilty parties faced an international tribunal in Tokyo. Though one of the judges, Justice R.B.

Pal from India, found some of the charges excessive and issued a dissenting opinion, Japan accepted the findings and the verdict in an agreement signed after the end of the American occupation in 1952. At no point during the trial was the alleged government conspiracy to enslave sexually 200,000 women brought to the judges' attention and it is impossible to assume that they would overlook something so important.

The American authorities, which occupied Japan for nearly eight years, practically ruled the country and had unobstructed access to its archives. They were interested in bringing down the Japanese politicians of the war period and didn't hide that, as we can see it in the infamous photograph of General Douglas MacArthur with the Emperor of Japan, where the General stands next to the Emperor with hands in his pockets. Most government ministries were purged of the old bureaucracy. A notable victim of that "downsizing" became the Holocaust hero Chiune Sugihara, who was fired and forced to make a living as a door-to-door light bulbs salesman.

The issue of the army brothels was investigated by the American authorities. Declassified documents show that the conclusion was that in most cases they employed paid prostitutes. Again, there was no sex slave conspiracy uncovered.

In the 1960's, Japan negotiated a reparations settlement with South Korea, signed in 1965. Consequently, a large sum was paid in full in several installments. During that period, South Korea didn't raise the "comfort women" issue, and neither did China. That happened only in 1991.

According to section 3.4 of the submission form, *"until 1991, the issue of the 'comfort women', and the systematic, coercive nature of the sexual slavery that they suffered, was not generally known to the world. Under the strong patriarchal ideology prevailing in many parts of Asia, women's sexuality was a taboo subject, and women who lost their chastity often had no place even within their family, thereby subjecting the victims to a strong social stigma and pressure not to speak about what had happened to them."*

This is not a plausible explanation of a delay of nearly fifty years. It fails to mention that in 1949, China was taken over by a totalitarian communist government and transformed into a society with a new morality, where "chastity" and "patriarchy" were obsolete concepts, actively eradicated. The People's Republic of China had always been involved in a propaganda war against Japan. "Comfort women" would have been a perfect propaganda point and any patriarchal considerations would be out of the question. China has no qualms about attacking its foes, a fact clearly displayed even in the submission discussed here. It was started by China but includes applicants from several countries. One of them is referred to by the derogatory name "Chinese Taipei" but it is actually the "Republic of China," commonly known as Taiwan. Even in a document intended to "restore" justice, China manages to put down one of its co-applicants, which shows what type of countries dominate UNESCO.

The "comfort women" issue became important only after China and South Korea acquired significant local economic power to compete with Japan. It was just one of the tools to create animosity against their competitor. In that sense, the situation is similar to the BDS (Boycott-Divest-Sanction) movement against Israel, whose goal is to discredit and isolate the country over phony "apartheid" issues. Just like the case of Israel, the driving force are various NGO's and

groups, which create the impression of a vast popular movement, even though they will fall apart without government financial support.

So far, the proponents of the movement have failed to produce convincing documents about the sex slave conspiracy. Even the documents presented to UNESCO in the submission are kept secret by the organization and the applicants. In 1993, the Japanese government, in the so-called “Kono Statement,” confirmed the existence of the wartime army brothels, but that was nothing different from the information collected by the Americans on the issue. There is nothing good in the existence of such establishments, but that is far from the claim of causing another Holocaust.

Despite the lack of evidence about mass atrocities, the applicants still insist in section 3.4 that a Holocaust has taken place: *“The revelation over the last 25 years of the factual truths of the matter has created diplomatic conflicts, including in relation to the demands from the victims, and organizations supporting them, for a formal apology from the Japanese government in the manner of the German government's apology for the Holocaust.”*

Compare this with the real Holocaust, where the facts started to come out in the early 1940’s, despite the reluctance of the Western media to cover them. Visiting Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, is a haunting experience. The visitors are overwhelmed by all the information, collected since the war. Millions of documents, photos, movies, and recordings tell the horror of the catastrophe. It is not surprising that many are trying to imitate the impact, applying it unsuccessfully to their own agenda.

Though the notion of a “comfort women” Holocaust has no basis in reality, the applicants don’t stop, in section 5.2 they claim that they have opened new frontiers to a wider discussion of sex slavery: *“The still pervasive and systematic sexual violence and sexual slavery perpetrated during armed conflicts of today, both internal and inter-state, are similar in nature to the atrocities suffered by the ‘comfort women’. Encouraged by the courage of the ‘comfort women’, victims of rape in places such as the former Yugoslavia, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Cambodia, have spoken about their sufferings in various formats, including their testimonies at the tribunals and hearings relating to the crimes committed against these women. Increased awareness of the ‘comfort women’ issue has also led to new studies being carried out in related areas, for example on the issue of sexual violence and forced prostitution during the Nazi Holocaust.”*

If it follows the logic of that statement, UNESCO may need to consider for condemnation some countries absent from the list. The 1959 invasion of Tibet by the People’s Republic of China ended with the deaths of about 1.2 million Tibetans, rapes of ten of thousands of women and the total destruction of the Tibetan Buddhist culture. That comes much closer to the concept of the Holocaust than what Japan was condemned for. Even worse, the government of Mao Zedong caused the deaths of tens of millions of its own people during the Great Leap Forward in 1957. Unlike Japan, which has become an exemplary peaceful country, China has attacked most of its neighbors at different times and continues to do so. These disastrous policies continue with the repressions against the followers of Falun Gong - thousands of them are arrested and killed and their organs harvested.

In the 1960’s, the South Korean army fought in the Vietnam War. It was confirmed by the Vietnamese government that Korean soldiers have raped thousands of women, however, there is

no information about entering documents of that event into the “Memory of the World” program. The crimes of the North Korean government against its own people are even more bloody.

Other catastrophic events, like the expulsion of 800,000 Jews from Muslim countries in the late 1940’s and the confiscation of their property, still haven’t caught the attention of UNESCO. Right now, thousands of Yezidis are killed by Muslim extremists and their women sold into sex slavery, yet UNESCO doesn’t seem to notice that either.

The organization, supposed to promote cultural mutual understanding, has fallen under the control of countries that perpetrate some of the worst abuses in the modern world. It is no wonder that some democratic countries refuse to finance such a betrayal of the principles of mutual respect and cooperation. If UNESCO is to preserve its relevance in the world, it should return to its original principles.

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