

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 28, 2012

The Honorable Sergey Lavrov  
Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation  
2650 Wisconsin Avenue Northwest  
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Foreign Minister Lavrov:

We are writing to express our strong objection to Palestinian attempts to approve an emergency inscription for the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem at the current meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The passage of such a highly politicized resolution would be in contravention of recommendations made by the independent International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), which found that the church is under adequate care.

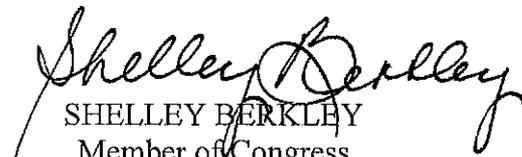
We are concerned that this blatant politicization of the Church of the Nativity by the Palestinians will undermine the legitimacy of the World Heritage process. The leaders of the Greek Orthodox, Catholic and Armenian churches have opposed the Palestinian proposal, saying it is not "opportune" to include the Church in the list of World Heritage sites at this time. Some worry that a World Heritage designation could upset the delicate arrangement of custodianship that has existed for many years. The Palestinians clearly are not motivated by technical concerns related to historical preservation, but rather are attempting to hijack the World Heritage process to further their own political objectives. We do not believe UNESCO in general or the World Heritage Committee in particular is the appropriate forum for debating such contentious issues that have little to do with historic preservation.

The Congress feels strongly that UN bodies such as UNESCO should not take positions on issues which must be resolved in bilateral final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, which is why we have passed legislation prohibiting funding to organizations such as UNESCO that have admitted the Palestinians as full member states. We believe that these political issues should be negotiated directly and without preconditions by Israelis and Palestinians themselves, rather than through politicized resolutions at international organizations. Given the unambiguous recommendation of ICOMOS and our shared interest in upholding the integrity of the World Heritage process, we would hope that you are able to put politics aside and reject this spurious resolution.

Sincerely,

  
HOWARD L. BERMAN  
Member of Congress

  
ELIOT L. ENGEL  
Member of Congress

  
SHELLEY BERKLEY  
Member of Congress