

UNESCO Supports Simon Wiesenthal Center's Destruction of Historic Muslim Cemetery in Jerusalem

By [Center for Constitutional Rights \(CCR\)](#)
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On June 5, 2014, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and the Campaign to Preserve Mamilla Jerusalem Cemetery sent a [letter](#) to the Chairman of the Organization of Islamic Countries and the State of Palestine's Representative to UNESCO urging them to take immediate action to oppose UNESCO's relationship with the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) and to urge UNESCO to preserve what remains of Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem. This follows a recent complaint addressed by the OIC to UNESCO regarding the latter's ongoing association with the SWC (see letters [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

The SWC has continued its desecration of one of the oldest and most venerated Muslim cemeteries in Jerusalem despite CCR and the Campaign's 2010 Petition to United Nations agencies and continued advocacy on behalf of descendants of those interred in the Cemetery. Rather than condemning the SWC's actions and demanding that Israel and the SWC cease their destruction of this important cultural heritage site in violation of human rights principles that UNESCO is meant to uphold, UNESCO is co-organizing and hosting from June 12-20, 2014 a SWC exhibit entitled "People, Book, Land: The 3500 Year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land." As the [letter](#) states, UNESCO's endorsement of this exhibit "contributes to the perception that UNESCO is validating the SWC's uprooting of Mamilla Cemetery in the Holy City of Jerusalem, an action which seeks to erase the long and deep history of Muslims and Palestinians in the same land."

The [letter](#) further urges the representatives "to consider appropriate steps to suspend the associate status that SWC enjoys at UNESCO as long as it perseveres in its desecration of the Cemetery and continues to flaunt the standards of tolerance that it supposedly advocates, while blatantly contradicting the humanistic values that UNESCO stands for."

The construction of the SWC's "Museum of Tolerance" on the site of the Mamilla Cemetery has already resulted in the secretive removal of thousands of human remains during excavations and infrastructure work. The project has faced wide-ranging opposition, including a public petition signed by nearly 10,000 individuals from around the world, Human Rights Council resolutions, a letter from 84 respected archaeologists decrying the destruction of a revered site as well as the illegal and unethical archaeological practices employed on the site, a letter from 45 Jerusalem community leaders, a resolution by the Central Conference of American Rabbis opposing the project, and the public outcry of numerous prominent Israeli scholars.

To read the full letter, click [here](#).

For more information, see CCR's [Mamilla Case page](#) and the [Campaign's website](#).

The Petitioners and the Campaign to Preserve Mamilla Jerusalem Cemetery which they initiated, is a wholly civil, volunteer initiative with no political coloring. All 60 individual petitioners are descendants of 15 of Jerusalem's most prominent and longest established families and have no relation with previous individual or institutional claimants in Israeli courts. In addition, the Petition was supported by 16 human rights non-governmental organizations, based in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem.

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