

Speech by Rabbi Marvin Hier

This is the first time in the history of the United Nations through its educational and cultural arm, UNESCO, has co-sponsored an exhibit which outlines the historic *raison d'être* for the UN decision to recognize a Jewish homeland in Palestine in 1947: the indisputable fact that the Jewish people have an uninterrupted 3,500-year relationship with the Holy Land.

This exhibit opens at a critical stage in the efforts to bring a just and viable peace to the Middle East, especially the people of Israel and the Palestinian people. But such a peace can only come when Israel's neighbors finally end their campaign to deny the Jewish people its national identity. No one can bypass this obstacle by pretending it doesn't exist. Peace is not a game like Monopoly where you can skip the inconvenient and proceed directly to Go.

The purpose of this exhibit is very clear: To put an end to the canard that a Jewish State came into being in 1948, not because Jews had any connection with the land of Israel, but because the world took pity on them as a result of the Holocaust.

This exhibit will educate the world by debunking myths with historic truth. Just like Egypt is a country with a 4,000-year footprint, so Israel too, has that 3,500-year footprint in every nook and cranny of the land of Israel.

This is not only the belief of Jews, but a view shared by billions of people on the planet, who hold the Bible sacred. What we know from the Torah and the writings of the Prophets, Christians know from their Old and New Testament. In that land, Jews have built a dynamic and thriving civilization over thousands of years, where the Mishna and the Jerusalem Talmud were compiled. Even when in exile, Jews, faced east toward Jerusalem when they prayed.

Wherever they lived in the Holy Land, the land was tilled and irrigated, trees planted, the grass as it is today, green and lush.

That land today is a world center for research in medicine and technology. A civilization built on the pillars of freedom and human dignity, where no one is compelled to worship a God, or vote for a particular party.

The State of Israel and the Jewish People respect the origins and followers of Christendom and Islam. The time has come for Israel's neighbors to end their attempted identity theft of the Jewish people's 3,500-year connection with the Holy Land.

As Sir Winston Churchill so eloquently told a delegation of Arab leaders in 1921, "It is manifestly right that the Jews, who are scattered all over the world, should have a national center and a National Home ... And where else could that be but in this land of Palestine, with which for more than three thousand years they have been intimately and profoundly associated?"

Rabbi Marvin Hier
Dean and Founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre

Speech at the Paris opening