



March 18, 2021

Mr. Ernesto OTTONE R.  
Assistant Director General for Culture UNESCO

REF: CLT/WHC/JER/21/458

Dear Mr. Ottone,

Thank you for your February 4<sup>th</sup> 2021 letter, regarding the World Heritage Site, “Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls”.

As per your request, we have inquired with the relevant authorities regarding possible excavations that might be undertaken by the Israeli authorities, as well as alleged prevention of reconstruction personnel from conducting repairs inside the Dome of the Rock.

We were informed by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), the official body responsible for protecting the antiquities in Israel, that there are no excavations executed near the Mughrabi Gate. Therefore, the foundations of Al-Aqsa Mosque located on the Temple Mount are maintained secured and intact. In addition, we reject any false accusations concerning the prevention of reconstruction personnel from conducting repairs. We were reported that all maintenance works at the Dome of the Rock are performed under the supervision of engineers and in coordination with the *Wakf*.

In this context, it is important to note that the borders of this UNESCO World Heritage property are the Old City's walls. Consequently, Israel will exclusively address communications, which respect the property borders, inscribed without any buffer zone. We would like to take this opportunity to refer to our previous letter (7<sup>th</sup> June 2020) regarding other unfounded claims, in which we expressed our hope that any future communication delivered through UNESCO's WHC concerning Jerusalem, will be thoroughly reviewed before its submission to Israel. Regretfully, your current letter, among recent communications from WHC, which is at best based on partial media reports, indicate that our request was not taken into consideration. Eventually, it seems that no serious examination of these fallacious complaints has been implemented by the WHC.



Nevertheless aforementioned, we would like to recall that Israel attributes extraordinary importance to the preservation of the Old City of Jerusalem; accordingly, whenever acclaimed damage to any archeological site is in concern, Israeli authorities will exhaustively investigate these claims through the proper law enforcement mechanisms and the Israeli justice system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Haim Assaraf'.

**Haim ASSARAF**

**Ambassador of Israel to International Organizations**