

**ei** THE ELECTRONIC INTIFADA

# PA refuses to defend bid for UN recognition of posters archive

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A poster produced by the leftist Palestinian faction PFLP in Lebanon in 1974.

A senior [Palestinian Authority](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/palestinian-) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/palestinian->

[authority](#)) diplomat has refused to defend an initiative aimed at ensuring that the United Nations recognizes the historical significance of posters opposing the Israeli occupation.

Next month, a program run by [UNESCO](#) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/unesco>) — the UN’s educational, scientific and cultural organization — will approve a number of collections of documents deemed to have historical and universal value.

Approximately 1,600 [Palestine-themed posters](#) (<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/sarah-irving/un-urged-recognize-cultural-significance-palestine-posters>) are among the nominations to Memory of the World, as the program is known.

The nomination has been strenuously opposed by a pro-Israel lobby group, the World Jewish Congress, which has [argued](#) (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/unesco-head-nixes-offensive-unacceptable-palestine-poster-collection/>) that the UN should not associate itself with the posters as they “could fuel hatred and anti-Semitic perceptions.”

Supporters of the collection approached the Palestinian Authority seeking help in countering the pro-Israel lobby.

Elias Sanbar, the PA’s ambassador to UNESCO, refused to help.

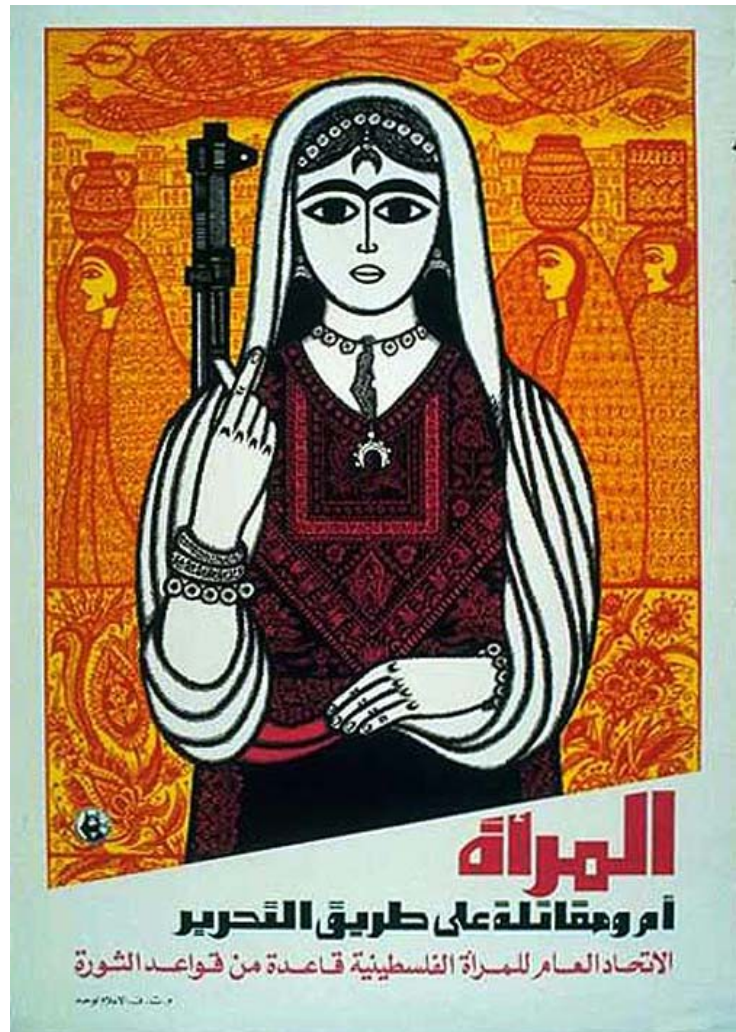
In an email message, seen by The Electronic Intifada, Sanbar stated that he would not get involved in the issue because the feeling that some of the posters were anti-Semitic was shared by Irena Bokova, UNESCO’s director-general.

“Some of the posters, as I have been told, are ‘anti-semitic,’” wrote Sanbar, who is based in Paris. “As I have not seen the posters, I have no opinion on this fact. But this is the official opinion of the DG of UNESCO. And you will understand that I won’t let my delegation enter into this debate.”

The email message was sent in late February.

## “Stunned”

[Dan Walsh](#)



A poster produced by the General Union of Palestinian Women in 1978.

(<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/dan-walsh>), who has assembled the collection, said he was “stunned” by Sanbar’s attitude.

“It completely contradicts Palestine’s push to legitimate the country’s cultural patrimony via the United Nations,” Walsh added.

The PA’s refusal to cooperate represents something of a U-turn. Last year, the PA formally requested that UNESCO recognize the collection’s significance. Palestine has been a member of the organization since 2011.

Bokova may have bowed to pressure from the [Israel lobby](#) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/israel-lobby>). She has reportedly [threatened](#)

([http://www.timesofisrael.com/unesco-head-nixes-offensive-unacceptable-palestine-poster-collection/?](http://www.timesofisrael.com/unesco-head-nixes-offensive-unacceptable-palestine-poster-collection/?fb_comment_id=839340776108225_839532422755727#f364a57dfc)

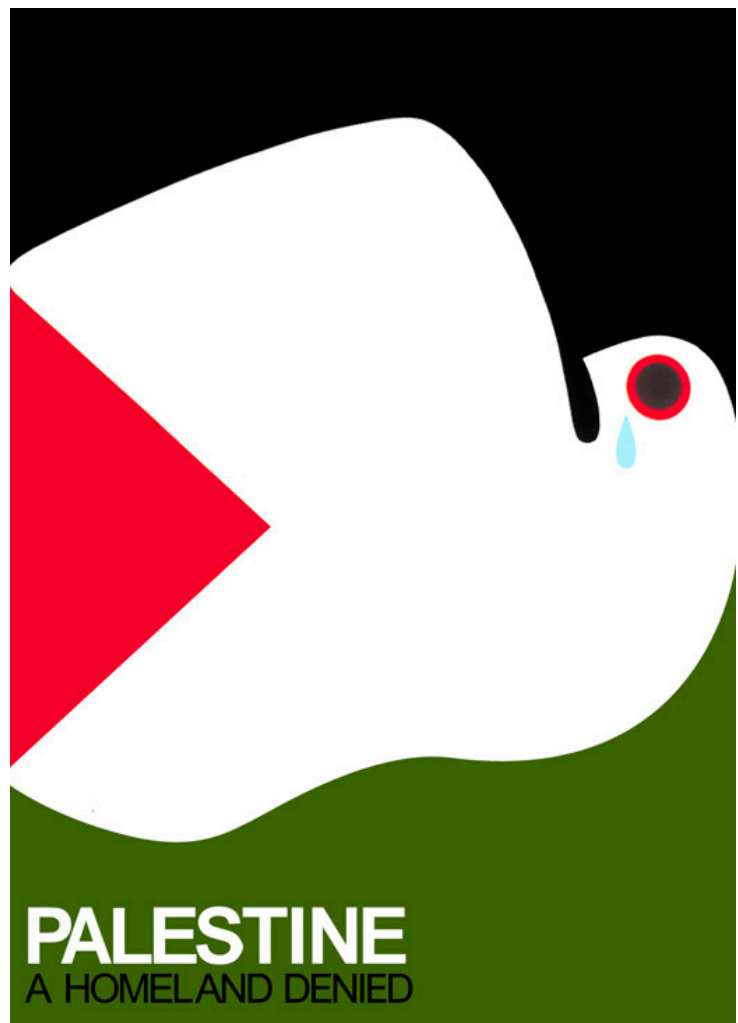
[fb\\_comment\\_id=839340776108225\\_839532422755727#f364a57dfc](http://www.timesofisrael.com/unesco-head-nixes-offensive-unacceptable-palestine-poster-collection/?fb_comment_id=839340776108225_839532422755727#f364a57dfc)) to veto a decision by a UNESCO international advisory committee if it approves the collection at a meeting in Abu Dhabi during the first week of October.

Walsh described the veto threat as “malfeasance.”

“It is not being used to advance the goals of the UN or UNESCO but rather the goals of Zionism,” he said.

In a letter to Bokova, Walsh pointed to numerous collections that UNESCO has recognized as significant in the past, even though they may not necessarily align with “values” to which the organization is committed. Such collections include Russian Federation posters from the 19th and 20th centuries and archives of police repression in Paraguay.

Bokova has been [named](#)



A poster designed by Pedro Laperal published in London in 1979.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals->

[network/2015/jul/09/will-the-next-un-secretary-general-be-a-woman](http://network/2015/jul/09/will-the-next-un-secretary-general-be-a-woman)) as a leading contender to become the UN's secretary-general. [Ban Ki-moon's \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/ban-ki-moon\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/ban-ki-moon) successor in that post will be selected toward the end of 2016.

## Offensive?

Boyan Radoykov, head of UNESCO's preservation department, told The Electronic Intifada that some of the Palestine-themed posters were "offensive." However, he would not identify particular posters in that category or state why they were offensive.

Radoykov admitted that UNESCO had previously recognized the significance of controversial archives.

"For instance we have collections from the Holocaust, but we are of course not endorsing their content," he said.

"But each case is extremely specific," Radoykov added. "There are some cases where the content may be considered unacceptable."

In February, Iskra Panevska, a representative of Memory of the World, told Dan Walsh by email that it is standard for nominations to refine or adjust their collections so as to better fit the criteria of the program. But Walsh has not been given the opportunity to remove posters deemed unacceptable to UNESCO.

Radoykov said he believed the Palestine-themed posters "reflect a certain vision that does not necessarily reflect what the Memory of the World program is about."

He nevertheless insisted that the final decision will be made "without any consideration for political aspects."

Despite being known as "liberation graphics," the Palestine-themed posters include propaganda from Zionist groups.

Walsh, an American, has been collecting Palestinian and Palestine-related posters since the 1970s.

His collection spans the 20th century and enables viewers to trace how images were used in political posters.

The Kalashnikov rifle, for example, featured prominently in material distributed by the [Palestine Liberation Organization](#)



A poster from the dawn of the Palestinian liberation movement.

(<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/plo>) in the 1970s and 1980s. It then disappeared during the “peace process” of the 1990s, yet started to re-emerge when the second intifada erupted.

## Easy to sabotage

The collection awaiting UNESCO approval is part of a broader archive that contains more than 10,400 posters and, according to Walsh, is growing every

day.

Walsh has been digitizing the collection since 1999. Much of it has been made [available \(http://www.palestineposterproject.org\)](http://www.palestineposterproject.org) on the Internet.

Salim Tamari, a Palestinian author and scholar, said, “There is nothing like it, in terms of the amount of data that’s in it.”

Amer Shomali, a graphic artist and filmmaker based in the occupied [West Bank \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/west-bank\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/west-bank) city of [Ramallah \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/ramallah\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/ramallah), noted that the collection is vital because many of the PLO’s posters were destroyed. The destruction occurred both during Israel’s 1982 invasion of [Lebanon \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/lebanon\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/lebanon) and when Israel bombed the PA’s Ramallah headquarters in 2002.

“Old posters trace how the visual description of Palestine has evolved,” added Shomali.

Without giving up hope, Dan Walsh argued that the bid to win UN approval may have been hampered by politics. “How easy it is to sabotage Palestine’s efforts for cultural recognition,” he said.

*All images courtesy of the [Palestine Posters Project Archives \(http://www.palestineposterproject.org\)](http://www.palestineposterproject.org).*

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► [Palestine Poster Project \(/tags/palestine-poster-project\)](/tags/palestine-poster-project) [Palestinian Authority \(/tags/palestinian-authority\)](/tags/palestinian-authority) [UNESCO \(/tags/unesco\)](/tags/unesco) [United Nations \(/tags/united-nations\)](/tags/united-nations) [Elias Sanbar \(/tags/elias-sanbar\)](/tags/elias-sanbar) [Dan Walsh \(/tags/dan-walsh\)](/tags/dan-walsh) [Israel Lobby \(/tags/israel-lobby\)](/tags/israel-lobby) [Irena Bokova \(/tags/irena-bokova\)](/tags/irena-bokova) [Boyan Radoykov \(/tags/boyan-radoykov\)](/tags/boyan-radoykov) [Palestine Liberation](#)