

UNESCO to vote on Palestinian membership

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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Montreal, October 28, 2011 — On Monday, Oct. 31, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will vote on the issue of Palestinian membership. The request was approved by the overwhelming majority of UNESCO's 58-member Executive Board on October 5, and must now go to the General Conference for final approval. Complicating the matter, US legislation passed over 15 years ago stipulates that all US funding be completely cut off to any UN agency that accepts the Palestinians as a full member. The Obama administration is reportedly reluctant to cut UNESCO funding, but likely will not be able to persuade the Republican-controlled Congress to change the law. The US currently provides about \$70 million a year — 22 percent of UNESCO's budget. Canada's position is unclear. Despite opposition by the US, Israel, Canada and Germany, on September 23 Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas formally presented an application for full membership in the UN of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders. The Palestinian request for UNESCO membership is part of Palestinian diplomats' efforts to get the international community to consider their territories a nation, and an important test of the breadth of support for the Palestinian bid for full UN membership. The Palestinian delegation has had observer status at UNESCO since 1974, but previous bids for full membership have failed.

"CJPME urges the Canadian government to support Palestinian full membership in UNESCO," says Thomas Woodley, President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME). CJPME notes that the Harper government has urged Palestinian leaders to not seek membership in the UN until a peace agreement with Israel is achieved. This effectively leaves the Palestinians at the mercy of the Israel, despite Israel's continued illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The approval of two thirds of the 193-member General Conference, which meets once every two years, is required for requests for full membership in UNESCO to pass. There has been speculation that if the UNESCO General Conference approves Palestinian membership and US funding is withdrawn, Arab countries and other nations would make up the shortfall. The US is currently a member of the UNESCO Executive Board, and could continue to be one, even if it withdraws its funding for the agency. Canada is not a member of the Board.

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