

# Israel halts UNESCO funds over Palestinian vote

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UNESCO's decision to grant the Palestinians full membership has prompted Israel to freeze its funding to the UN's cultural agency.

The Israelis say UNESCO's move has damaged chances of peace, and so they will halt annual payments worth more than 1.4 million euros.

"Government budgets that were earmarked for UNESCO will now go to support projects, regional projects, Middle East projects, designed to encourage cooperation in science, culture and education. These projects will bolster peace and not undermine peace as has done the recent decision by UNESCO," said Mark Regev, a spokesman for the Israeli prime minister.

Israel, which has UNESCO heritage sites itself, is following the move made by its ally the US. Washington said it was bound by law to cut its funding in anger of the Palestinians.

"We never felt that we are really responsible for this blackmail by the US administration really to cut funding for such agencies. We should not take that, the blame should be taken by the American side," said Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Malki.

A day after UNESCO's vote, Israel announced it would speed up the building of some 2,000 housing units in the West Bank and around Jerusalem. It also announced the transfer of funds to the Palestinian Authority.

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