



August 11, 2009

Dr. Claire Smith
The President
World Archaeological Congress

Dear Dr. Smith,

We are writing to you to express our strong protest at the fashion in which the WAC Inter-Congress, presently being conducted in Ramallah, has been organized and our indignation regarding its content as expressed in the abstracts.

The congress relates specifically to the conduct of Israeli archaeology but, to our knowledge, Israeli archaeologists were not invited nor were they informed about the congress prior to your mail to Dr. Uzi Dahari this week. We remind you that this is a conference organized by the World Archaeological Congress and not a Palestinian archaeological organization. This requires you to make it universal. The omission to include or invite Israeli speakers to address issues that directly affect their daily work shows that this conference is certainly not that. We need not remind you that one of the principles governing the WAC is the promotion of dialogue between archaeologists, but this conference is a monologue that fails to live up to the basic ideals expressed in the introductory paragraph for this conference. We expect the WAC to be a facilitator to build bridges of a 'shared cultural heritage' (your words from the introductory paragraph) but one-sided, biased discussions achieve quite the opposite.

The organizers state that "The world is a complex place and due to Israeli government regulations it appears that some Israeli archaeologists who may have wished to attend WAC Ramallah may be unable to do so. We regret the situation." This statement is manifestly untrue. Israeli archaeologists did visit Ramallah in past years and any archaeologist wishing to attend the congress, could - had they been invited - obtain a permit to travel to Ramallah, as many Israeli journalists indeed do routinely. The inclusion of this statement in the Congress documents, and the expression of regret with which it concludes, casts a dubious light on the organizers' professional and civic integrity.

The conference programme is full of abstracts condemning Israeli archaeology and its practices concerning the management of the cultural heritage. We obviously do not contest the legitimacy of individual contributors to their views, but the huge numbers of inaccuracies and the type of insidious 'past-mastering', for which Israel stands accused, makes this conference little more than a political demonstration. We find it very sad that the WAC has uncritically given its name to this.

We note that the conference will also be touring in Jerusalem on Wednesday to visit archaeological sites. May we remind you that the cultural heritage of Jerusalem is




under the auspices of the Israeli authorities, a de-facto situation for which Israel is responsible by international law. We find it unacceptable that the WAC will be touring in an area of our responsibility without any coordination with us. Furthermore it is blatantly unethical to visit active archaeological sites without informing the archaeologists charged with the excavation. We can imagine how you would view a conference visiting the area of your fieldwork in Barunga-Wugularr without your knowledge and without giving you an opportunity to express your ideas. We see also that the tour is to be led by an archaeologist opposed to the excavation in Silwan/City of David, but without the participation of the archaeologists working on the site. Consequently, congress participants will be exposed only to the view that negates the work undertaken there, without hearing the views of those who conduct the excavations and the reasons that led to their initiation. This is both unprofessional and unethical. We ask you to cancel the tour in its present format and reorganize it as professionally required, that is, by asking Israeli archaeologists to tell their side of the story regarding the situation on the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif, and by inviting the archaeologists working in Silwan/City of David to present their work.

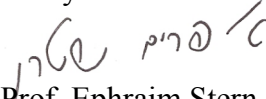
Had we an inkling that such a congress is to take place, we would have expressed our reservations much earlier; but since the first undersigned has learned about it only through your e-mail of yesterday, 10 August 2009, we hurry to do so now.

We would be very grateful if you were to distribute this letter to the participants of the Ramallah congress.


Yours sincerely



Dr. Uzi Dahari
Vice-Director, for Archaeology
Israel Antiquities Authority



Prof. Ephraim Stern
Chair,
Archaeological Council of Israel



Jon Seligman
Jerusalem Regional Archaeologist
Israel Antiquities Authority

Cc:

Prof. Benjamin Z. Kedar – Member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Chair, Israel Antiquities Authority

Shuka Dorfman – Director, Israel Antiquities Authority

Prof. Anna Belfor-Cohen - Head of the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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