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Destruction of the cultural heritage in Hebron

European Parliament resolution on the destruction of the cultural heritage of Hebron

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338,
- A. whereas the Israeli government has a legitimate right to defend its citizens from terrorist attacks; whereas the fact that Israeli civilians are the target of terrorist attacks on the population, which is to be condemned, nonetheless cannot be accepted as a reason to destroy the Palestinian heritage,
- B. recalling the international conventions which outlaw collective reprisals against civilian populations that cannot be considered responsible for acts committed by individuals,
- C. whereas on 29 November 2002 the Israeli army issued a military order calling for the demolition of numerous homes in Hebron's Old City in order to create a road that will directly connect the Israeli settlement of Qiriat Arba with the Ibrahimi Mosque,
- D. whereas many of the buildings threatened by this plan date from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries and are intrinsic to the historic built environment surrounding the mosque,
- E. whereas, owing to the presence in the centre of Hebron of a small Israeli settlement, composed of approximately 400 persons and protected by many more soldiers, most of the city of Hebron has been under a frequent 24-hour curfew for the past two years and has already faced extensive destruction,
- F. whereas, in particular, in the Old City of Hebron Palestinians are now effectively excluded, and whereas Muslims no longer have access to the Ibrahimi Mosque, which is one of the holiest places for Islam,
- G. whereas Israel must freeze all settlement expansion, in line with the previous requests of the international community, the provisions of the Oslo agreement, and the conclusions of the Mitchell Commission in 2001,
- H. whereas Israel must comply with the relevant UNESCO conventions and with the 1954 Hague Convention,
- I. whereas Christians should have full access to the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, especially during the Christmas festivities,
- 1. Condemns unreservedly all acts of terrorism and all loss of life;

2. Considers the demolition of historic places in Palestine to be an unacceptable and additional form of collective punishment inflicted on the Palestinian people;
3. Considers that the destruction of the cultural heritage is a further obstacle to restoring a climate of minimum mutual trust and dialogue between the parties in order to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict;
4. Urges the government of Israel to stop the announced plan to demolish parts of Hebron's Old City, and to refrain from any further step which undermines the cultural heritage of Palestine;
5. Reiterates its previous call for freezing of settlements, since most of them are both a major obstacle to peace and a threatening presence in Palestinian daily life;
6. Recalls that the cultural dimension, which includes the preservation of the historical heritage, is one of the three basic elements of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership;
7. Calls on the Israeli authorities to grant access for all believers to the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and to the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, as well as to all the other places of worship frequented by the various faiths;
8. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Government and Parliament of Israel, the Palestinian National Authority, the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Secretary-General of UNESCO, the Hebron City Council and the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, and the Centre for Architectural Conservation ('RIWAQ').