

May 26, 2026

Knesset Committee moves forward to finalize “Heritage Authority in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip Law, 2026”

Today (May 26th, 2026), the Knesset’s Education, Culture and Sports Committee continued its marathon discussions on the “[Heritage Authority in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip Law, 2026](#),” following the bill’s first reading in the [Knesset plenum on May 11](#).

The consecutive committee sessions held over the past ten days are intended to finalize the legislation ahead of its second and third (and final) readings in the plenum. The proposed legislation seeks to [establish a civilian authority under the Ministry of Heritage](#) that would assume responsibility for heritage sites and antiquities in the occupied West Bank, replacing the Civil Administration’s Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOA) within COGAT. **If enacted, this would constitute an unprecedented transfer of an entire field of governance in occupied territory from the military commander and the Ministry of Defense to a civilian Israeli authority operating under Israeli law.**

As such, it would effectively erase the distinction between the administration of the West Bank and the governmental system of the State of Israel, thereby undermining the principle of the temporary nature of occupation. **Moreover, recent versions of the bill have expanded the proposed jurisdiction to include Areas A and B of the West Bank. Last week, the bill’s sponsors, led by MK Amit Halevi (Likud), also added the Gaza Strip to the territory covered by the proposed authority.** Emek Shaveh has been present at all the committee discussions over the past twenty months. Executive Director, Alon Arad was the first to point out that the Palestinian Antiquities Law legislated by the Palestinian Authority in 2018 is currently in force in Areas A and B of the West Bank, a fact that the sponsors of the bill seemed to think they could ignore.

Today’s discussion was attended for the first time by a representative of the Foreign Ministry. Despite the bill’s significant implications for Israel’s foreign relations, as well as for international academic and financial partnerships (such as Horizon and ERC programs), the ministry had not sent a representative to any of the hearings held since the fall of 2024. Yet even today, the Foreign Ministry representative refused to answer questions raised by opposition members Gilad Kariv (Democrats), Moshe Tur-paz (Yesh Atid), and Simon Davidson (Yesh-Atid) as well as Emek Shaveh regarding whether the ministry had examined the implications of the legislation for issues such as Trump’s Gaza Peace plan, the Abraham Accords, The Interim Agreement (Oslo II) or the EU-Israel Association Agreement. Representatives of the National Security Council and the Foreign Ministry disclosed that Cabinet Secretary Yossi Fuchs was appointed by PM

Netanyahu to examine possible implications and “alternatives” to the law. However, they refused to clarify whether this referred to alternatives to the legislation itself or merely to specific provisions within it. Despite reports that the Cabinet Secretary is considering alternatives, and despite the potential severe diplomatic implications of the legislation, the bill’s sponsors are continuing to push forward with the legislative process in an effort to complete committee approval and pass the law in the plenum within the week.

Today’s was the second committee discussion this week. On Sunday (May 24th), much of the discussion was devoted to legal experts explaining the legal anomalies and operational absurdities involved in applying Israeli legislation to the Gaza Strip. A representative of the IDF’s International Law Division clarified that the official position of both the State of Israel and the IDF is that Israel is not an occupying power in Gaza. The representative, Omri Shalom, stated that the army is currently operating under instructions from the political echelon to advance the Trump plan, “part of which involves the introduction of international bodies to manage civilian life in the territory.” He further warned that “the introduction of an Israeli body through primary legislation in such a manner could undermine efforts to advance the plan.” Ahead of Sunday’s discussion, the committee’s legal counsel published an unusually severe legal opinion warning that the bill raises significant legal concerns due to the transfer of operational powers in occupied territory, **including powers relating to Palestinian residents and immovable property**, to an Israeli authority directly subordinate to the Minister of Heritage. According to the opinion, this constitutes a “substantial deviation” from the current manner in which the territory is administered. The legal opinion further warned that the legislation would strengthen international claims of creeping annexation.

It is also important to note that representatives of academia and the archaeological community, as well as the Legal Advisor of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), continue to voice their principled opposition to the legislation. From the perspective of the archaeologists, the underlying assumption is that the law, along with its requirement that academics serve on the governing board of the newly proposed authority, could amplify calls to boycott the Israeli archaeological (and academic) community, and empower those seeking to exclude Israeli archaeologists from international forums and organizations in the field. The IAA, through its Legal Advisor, argued that the IAA’s involvement in the proposed authority for the West Bank would create a conflict of interest between the bodies.

We would like to add that, as we understand it, the involvement of academics and the IAA in this new authority legally blurs the necessary distinction between legitimate archaeology practiced within the State of Israel and illegitimate archaeology carried out by Israel in the West Bank. As we have argued from the very beginning, while the first to be harmed will be entire Palestinian communities living alongside or atop archaeological

sites throughout the West Bank, the archaeological community, both in academia and within the IAA, could also find itself in jeopardy due to the mandated involvement in the new heritage authority. Following Sunday's discussion, MK Gilad Kariv (Democrats) submitted an urgent appeal to the Knesset's legal adviser, Sagit Afik, demanding that the committee halt the planned votes on the bill. Kariv described the legislation as "a clear annexation bill, which removes authority from the IDF and the Civil Administration while at the same time subordinating the activities of a governmental corporation to military legislation. It is a two-way form of annexation that is illogical and unconstitutional."

The committee is due to meet again on Thursday to review the objections to the bill, prior to a committee vote, and a final vote in the plenum.