

June 3rd, 2026

Update: Advancement of Heritage Authority Bill Halted

We can now confirm that on Tuesday (02.06.2026), after nearly two years and seventeen Knesset committee sessions, the “Judea, Samaria and Gaza Strip Heritage Authority Law, 2026” was [halted](#), at least for the time being, following intervention by Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The sponsor of the legislation, MK Amit Halevi (Likud), sought to establish a civilian authority under the Minister of Heritage that would assume responsibility for the oversight and management of heritage sites and antiquities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) thus replacing the Civil Administration’s Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOA) within COGAT. Had it been voted into law, it would have constituted an unprecedented transfer of an entire field of governance in the Occupied Territories from the military commander and the Ministry of Defense to a civilian Israeli authority operating under Israeli law. **Such a measure would have constituted a serious violation of international law, breached Israel’s obligations to the international community, and further exacerbated the harm inflicted on Palestinian communities throughout the West Bank.**

As we have [noted](#) throughout the legislative process, the bill suffered from fundamental flaws from the outset. No serious preparatory work was undertaken to assess the actual challenges involved in managing cultural heritage in the West Bank, nor was there any meaningful examination of Israel’s legal obligations and constraints under international law and binding international agreements. The result was a piece of legislation that was deeply problematic from both a professional and legal perspective.

The insistence on advancing the bill despite these shortcomings underscored what many observers had already concluded: the primary motivation behind the legislation was not the professional management or protection of antiquities, but rather the advancement of annexation of the West Bank. Had the bill reflected a genuine concern for antiquities, alternative mechanisms could have been explored that would not entail further violations of international law nor the undermining of Israel’s commitments to the Palestinians and the wider international community.

It is also noteworthy that the archaeological and heritage community in Israel demonstrated

an unusually broad consensus in [opposition to the bill](#). This highlights the importance of clear and principled professional positions. When a professional community speaks with a unified voice, it becomes significantly more difficult to disregard its expertise. This experience also suggests that meaningful reform in the field of heritage management in East Jerusalem and the West Bank remains possible, provided that professional bodies are willing to articulate and defend positions grounded in accepted legal, ethical, and academic standards. We also wish to reiterate our position that no meaningful protection and conservation of antiquities in the oPt can be achieved without the full cooperation of the Palestinian communities whose lives are interwoven with these sites and the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

During the last few discussions of the bill at the Knesset's Education, Culture and Sport Committee, representatives of the Israeli MFA and the National Security Council (NSC) mentioned that PM Netanyahu had appointed Government Secretary, Mr Yossi Fuchs, to examine the proposed legislation and search for "alternatives". At present, the legislation appears to be frozen and is unlikely to advance during the current Knesset's term to a final vote in the plenum.

However, it is important to emphasize that the bill has yet to be withdrawn (a procedure that we will demand). And as long as it remains within the legislative process, it can be revived relatively quickly. Since it has already passed its first reading, a future government or coalition could apply legislative continuity and resume the process from the point at which it was halted. In practical terms, the bill remains very close to being ready for second and third readings.

We would like to thank all those who raised concerns, brought attention to the implications of this legislation, and helped build pressure against its advancement. At the same time, significant challenges remain. Emek Shaveh will continue to monitor and report on these developments, and to oppose the weaponization of cultural heritage and archaeology as tools for dispossession, annexation, and political control.