

US to leave UNESCO, citing anti-Israel bias

UNESCO called the US departure -- which it said will take effect in December 2026 -- regrettable

AFP | Paris, France

The United States said yesterday it would quit UNESCO, saying the UN cultural and education agency, best known for establishing world heritage sites, is biased against Israel and promotes "divisive" causes.

President Donald Trump had already ordered withdrawal from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation once before, in



2017 during his first term. President Joe Biden then reestablished US membership.

"Continued involvement in UNESCO is not in the national interest of the United States," State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said.

UNESCO called the US departure -- which it said will take effect in December 2026 -- regrettable, but unsurprising, and said its financial impact would be limited.

"I deeply regret President Donald Trump's de-

cision to once again withdraw the United States of America from UNESCO," Director-General Audrey Azoulay said, adding the move contradicted fundamental principles of multilateralism.

"However regrettable, this announcement was expected, and UNESCO has prepared for it," she said.

In recent years, Azoulay said, UNESCO had "undertaken major structural reforms and diversified our funding sources", including with private and voluntary governmental contributions.

The US share of UNESCO's total budget currently stands at eight percent, she said. This compares to an estimate of nearly 20 percent a decade ago, according to a UNESCO source who asked not to be named.

No staff redundancies were planned, Azoulay said.

Bruce described UNESCO as working "to advance divisive social and cultural causes" and being overly focused on UN sustainability goals, which she

described as a "globalist, ideological agenda".

'Same as seven years ago'

Bruce also highlighted what she said was the body's anti-Israeli position in admitting Palestine as a state.

"UNESCO's decision to admit the 'State of Palestine' as a member state is highly problematic, contrary to US policy, and contributed to the proliferation of anti-Israel rhetoric within the organisation," Bruce said.

The administration has also objected to UNESCO's recognition of heritage sites in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem as Palestinian.

Azoulay said the reasons put forward by the United States "are the same as seven years ago" although, she said, "the situation has changed profoundly, political tensions have receded, and UNESCO today constitutes a rare forum for consensus on concrete and action-oriented multilateralism".

Washington's claims "contra-

dict the reality of UNESCO's efforts", she added, "especially in the field of Holocaust education and the fight against antisemitism".

The source at UNESCO described the US move as "purely political, without any real factual base".

The organisation had already been "forced" to do without US money for several years after their departure in 2017, the source told AFP.

UNESCO adapted but new sources of funding would still need to be found, the source said.

'Always welcome'

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar welcomed on X the US decision: "This is a necessary step, designed to promote justice and Israel's right for fair treatment in the UN system."

"The United Nations requires fundamental reforms in order to remain relevant," he said.

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon,

called UNESCO "an organisation that has lost its way" and praised the US for demonstrating "moral clarity in the international arena".

French President Emmanuel Macron said on X that UNESCO had his "unwavering support" that would not weaken after the US departure.

The UN organisation describes its mission as promoting education, scientific cooperation and cultural understanding.

It oversees a list of heritage sites aimed at preserving unique environmental and architectural gems, ranging from Australia's Great Barrier Reef and the Serengeti in Tanzania to the Acropolis of Athens and Pyramids of Egypt.

Twenty-six world heritage sites are located in the United States.

The UNESCO source said that the United States will continue to be represented on the world heritage committee even after leaving the organisation formally, just as it had in 2017

Extreme weather misinformation 'putting lives at risk,' study warns

● Nearly all of the analyzed posts on Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram lacked fact-checks or Community Notes

AFP | Washington, United States

Major social media platforms are enabling and profiting from misinformation around extreme weather events, endangering lives and impeding emergency response efforts, a research group said yesterday.

The report from the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) -- which analyzed 100 viral posts on each of three leading platforms during recent natural disasters including deadly Texas floods -- highlights how their algorithms amplify conspiracy theorists while sidelining life-saving information.

"The influence of high-profile conspiracy theorists during climate disasters is drowning out emergency response efforts," the report said, adding that the trend was "putting lives at risk."

Nearly all of the analyzed posts on Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram lacked fact-checks or Community Notes, a crowd-sourced verification system increasingly being adopted as an alternative to professional fact-checkers, the report said.



Elon Musk-owned X lacked fact-checks or Community Notes on 99% of the posts, while Google-owned YouTube "failed entirely," with zero fact-checks or Community Notes, CCDH said.

The report noted that well-known conspiracy theorist Alex Jones's false claims during the LA wildfires amassed more views on X throughout January than the combined reach of major emergency response agencies and news outlets, including the Los Angeles Times.

"The rapid spread of climate conspiracies online isn't accidental. It's baked into a business

model that profits from outrage and division," said Imran Ahmed, CCDH's chief executive.

During the wildfires, online scammers placed social media advertisements impersonating federal emergency aid agencies to steal victims' personal information, Ahmed said, citing local officials. "When distraught people can't distinguish real help from online deception, platforms become complicit in the suffering of innocent people," he said.

The tech platforms did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

'Dangerous' falsehoods

Following natural disasters, misinformation tends to surge across social media -- fueled by accounts from across the political spectrum -- as many platforms scale back content moderation and reduce reliance on human fact-checkers, often accused by conservative advocates of a liberal bias.

During Hurricane Milton, which struck Florida last year, social media was flooded with baseless claims that the storm had been engineered by politicians using weather manipulation.

Similarly, the LA wildfires were falsely blamed on so-called "government lasers," a conspiracy theory amplified by viral posts.

Augustus Doricko, chief executive of cloud seeding company Rainmaker, said he received death threats online after conspiracy theorists blamed him for the devastating floods in Texas.

The CCDH study found that the worst offenders spreading extreme weather misinformation were verified users with large followings, many of whom were attempting to monetize their posts.

Eighty eight percent of misleading extreme weather posts on X came from verified accounts, CCDH said. On YouTube, 73% of such posts originated from verified users, while on Meta, the figure was 64%.

Trump says confident US to reach Philippines trade deal



US President Donald Trump speaks alongside Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. during a meeting in the Oval Office at the White House

Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump voiced confidence Tuesday at reaching a trade deal with the Philippines to ease his threatened tariffs as he welcomed his counterpart Ferdinand Marcos to the White House.

"We're very close to finishing a trade deal. A big trade deal, actually," Trump said as he met Marcos in the Oval Office. "He's a very tough negotiator. So far we're not there because he's negotiating too tough," Trump said.

But Trump, in response to questions, said he believed the two countries would ultimately reach an agreement.

"We'll probably agree on something," Trump said.

The Philippines, a former US colony and longtime ally, was among countries confronted by Trump with letters this

month warning of 20 percent tariffs on all their goods coming into the United States as of August 1 -- up from a previous threat of 17 percent.

The trade rift comes despite increasingly close defense relations between the United States and the Philippines, which has seen tensions with China.

The United States last year under former president Joe Biden deployed ground-launched missiles in the Philippines. Washington has also eyed ammunition manufacturing in the Philippines, despite the closure in 1992 of the US naval base at Subic Bay due to heavy public pressure.

"All of what we consider part of the modernization of the Philippine military is really a response to the circumstances that surround the situation in the South China Sea," Marcos said.