International Relations · GS - II

‘Too little cash, too much politics, leaves UNESCO fighting for life.’ Discuss the statement in the light of US’ withdrawal and its accusation of the cultural body as being ‘anti-Israel bias’.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2019	GS - II	International Relations

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

UNESCO; multilateralism; cultural heritage; education; scientific cooperation; funding constraints; political disputes; US withdrawal; Israel-related controversy; institutional neutrality; reform of international organisations

Model Answer

Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication. Financial constraints and geopolitical disputes can undermine its ability to fulfil these objectives.

Significance of the Issue

- **Funding pressures:** The United States announced its withdrawal from UNESCO in 2017, citing concerns including alleged anti-Israel bias and the need for organisational reform. The withdrawal took effect in 2018; the US subsequently rejoined in 2023.
- **Political polarisation:** Disputes involving Israel and Palestine have repeatedly affected UNESCO's deliberations, raising concerns about the politicisation of cultural and heritage decisions.

- **Financial consequences:** The loss of contributions from major members can constrain programmes, staffing and field operations.
- **Impact on global public goods:** UNESCO supports education, cultural heritage protection, scientific collaboration and the preservation of endangered traditions. Political conflict can divert attention from these priorities.
- **Institutional credibility:** Perceptions of selective treatment can undermine confidence in multilateral organisations.

Way Forward

UNESCO needs transparent decision-making, balanced representation, predictable funding and objective criteria for heritage-related decisions. Member states should resolve political disagreements through dialogue rather than undermining international cooperation.

Conclusion

The episode illustrates how financial dependence and geopolitical rivalry can weaken multilateral institutions. UNESCO's effectiveness requires both sustainable funding and protection of its professional mandate from partisan pressures.

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