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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by United Nations Watch, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Antisemitism and Incitement in Palestinian Education

United Nations Watch is concerned that the Palestinian education system continues to promote antisemitism and incite terrorism, including in schools of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Recently two UN treaty bodies reviewing the State of Palestine's compliance with international human rights treaties criticized racist content in Palestinian educational materials. In August 2019, the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination criticized the existence of hate speech in "school curricula and textbooks," which it said "fuels hatred and may incite violence, particularly hate speech against Israelis, which at times also fuels antisemitism."¹ In February 2020, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about reports that Palestinian textbooks contained content "that do[es] not promote peace and tolerance."²

Regrettably, Palestinian Authority (PA) textbooks continue to incite antisemitism and terrorism. In May this year, the European Parliament condemned the PA in this regard, expressing concern "that problematic material in Palestinian school textbooks has still not been removed" and "about the continued failure to act effectively against hate speech and violence in school textbooks." The European Parliament stated that EU funds should be used only to draft "curricula which reflects UNESCO standards of peace, tolerance, coexistence, and non-violence."³

IMPACT-se, an NGO dedicated to reviewing school textbooks for compliance with UNESCO standards of peace and tolerance, conducts regular reviews of Palestinian textbooks. IMPACT-se's most recent study, covering 2020 to 2021, found that the Palestinian curriculum had "moved further from meeting UNESCO standards," contained "a systematic insertion of violence, martyrdom and jihad across all grades and subjects," and "rejected" the possibility of peace with Israel.⁴

Concerningly, these same textbooks are used by UNRWA, which is unique among UN agencies in that it provides government-like services to its constituents, including healthcare and education. UNRWA operates 711 schools for 526,000 students with over 22,000 educational staff.⁵ In addition to violating various international treaties as noted above, the textbook content that incites terrorism and racism also violates UN and UNRWA internal policies concerning staff neutrality and impartiality.

Attempts by UNRWA to change this curriculum have been met with fierce resistance by the PA.⁶ In a January 2020 fact sheet, UNRWA claimed that it addresses the problematic content in PA textbooks through its "robust" review system which ensures its education "is

¹ Concluding observations on the combined initial and second periodic reports of the State of Palestine, UN Doc. CERD/C/PSE/CO/1-2, ¶ 19 (c) (Aug. 29, 2019).

² Concluding observations on the initial report of the State of Palestine, UN Doc. CRC/C/PSE/CO/1, 54 (e) (Feb. 10, 2020).

³ Report on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2018, Section III – Commission and executive agencies, European Parliament, Doc. No. A9-0069/2020 (March 3, 2020), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0069_EN.pdf; Raphael Ahren and TOI Staff, EU parliament passes resolution condemning hate speech in Palestinian textbooks, *TIMES OF ISRAEL* (May 15, 2020), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-parliament-passes-resolution-condemning-hate-speech-in-palestinian-textbooks/>.

⁴ The 2020-21 Palestinian School Curriculum Grades 1-12, IMPACT-SE (May 2021), https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-Reports_-Updated-Selected-Examples_May-2021.pdf.

⁵ What we do: education, UNRWA (last visited May 13, 2021), <https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/education>.

⁶ PA Ministry of Education strongly opposes any attempt by UNRWA to change PA curriculum and schoolbooks, *PMW* (Nov. 8, 2017), https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=122&doc_id=24274.

in line with UN values and principles.”⁷ However, a now declassified United States of America Government Accountability Office report found that while UNRWA had developed complementary teaching materials to address problematic textbook content, as of April 2018, it had not trained teachers on these materials nor had it distributed them in the classroom.⁸ One of the reasons cited by UNRWA for failing to train teachers on these complementary materials was “staff refusal to attend training and workshops.” According to UNRWA, some staff opposed the use of these materials and others boycotted the training.⁹

Moreover, when UNRWA did produce its own educational content for students during COVID-19, that material was found by IMPACT-se to be rife with problematic content, including incitement to violence and hatred and support for terrorism, such as glorifying Dalal Mughrabi who participated in the 1978 Coastal Road Massacre.¹⁰ According to IMPACT-se director Marcus Sheff, the “UNRWA-created material is, in places, more extremist than PA material it complements.”¹¹

When this was exposed, UNRWA claimed the materials had been distributed “mistakenly” and blamed the teachers who had prepared the materials, the majority of whom it said “are refugees themselves.”¹² This statement shifting blame to the UNRWA staff who created the problematic content is revealing. It shows that the problem of racism and terrorist incitement in Palestinian education runs much deeper than the textbooks.

Indeed, since 2015, UN Watch has published six separate reports exposing a total of 100 UNRWA staff Facebook pages containing antisemitism and terrorist incitement. UNRWA staff consistently propagate antisemitism and support for terrorism on social media. This phenomenon is systemic and actually dates back to UNRWA’s early days. In their new authoritative book *The War of Return*, UNRWA experts Dr. Einat Wilf and Adi Schwartz describe the indoctrination in UNRWA schools in the 1960s, 70s and 80s:

“The teachers were Palestinians—refugees and their offspring in the camps—who passed on their personal experiences. Pupils reported that their teachers were faithful to the national struggle...”

“UNRWA’s schools repeatedly emphasized the idea of a violent return to the territory of the state of Israel...”

“All the maps of Palestine used in the schools showed the whole of Israel painted in black...”

“UNRWA’s education system effectively became an instrument for the mobilization of the population of the camps for the Palestinian armed struggle...”¹³

Therefore, it is no surprise that UNRWA teachers who “are refugees themselves” would create hateful content for their students or refuse to attend UNRWA trainings on complementary materials meant to replace hateful content in PA textbooks.

⁷ Demystifying the UNRWA approach to curriculum, UNRWA (Jan. 2020),

https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/demystifying_unrwa_approach_to_curriculum2020.pdf.

⁸ State Has Taken Actions to Address Potentially Problematic Textbook Content but Should Improve Its Reporting to Congress, US GAO (June 2019), p. 16, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-448.pdf>.

⁹ Id. at pp. 16, 21.

¹⁰ Itam Shalev, Review of UNRWA-Produced Study Materials in the Palestinian Territories, IMPACT-SE (Jan. 2021), <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/UNRWA-Produced-Study-Materials-in-the-Palestinian-Territories.pdf>; see also Monitoring group: UNRWA textbooks glorify terror, deny Israel’s existence, TIMES OF ISRAEL (Jan. 14, 2021), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/monitoring-group-unrwa-textbooks-glorify-terror-deny-israels-existence/>.

¹¹ Id.

¹² UNRWA Improves Safeguards on Ensuring Adherence of Educational Materials with UN Principles; Prepares to Launch Secure Agencywide Self-Learning Platform, UNRWA (Jan. 14, 2021), <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-improves-safeguards-ensuring-adherence-educational-materials-un>.

¹³ Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf, *The War of Return*, ALL POINTS BOOKS (2020), pp. 122-126.

Furthermore, separate from the issue of textbooks, both the PA and Hamas misuse educational opportunities to incite violence in children as a matter of course.

For example, the PA has a practice of using school names to honor terrorists and glorify martyrdom, thus turning terrorists into role models for children. Children studying at these schools have expressed the aspiration to “reach the level” of the terrorist for whom the school is named.¹⁴ According to Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), dozens of PA Ministry of Education schools are named for terrorists.¹⁵

This practice is not limited to schools. Palestinian youth centers, summer camps, and sporting events also are frequently named for terrorists. In 2020, PA President Mahmoud Abbas’s Fatah party named a summer camp for high school boys after Omar Abu Laila who was killed by Israeli soldiers in the course of carrying out a terrorist attack in which he murdered two Israelis. Photos of the camp showed the participants dressed in military uniform and holding a symbolic funeral for the “martyr” Omar Abu Laila.¹⁶

Both the PA and Hamas also turn educational activities into platforms to teach hate and violence. Every year Hamas runs summer camps in which it trains children in military tactics and weapons use.¹⁷ Likewise, summer camps run by Fatah and the PLO teach children to venerate famous Palestinian martyrs like Abu Jihad, who was responsible for terror attacks in which 125 Israelis were killed.¹⁸

Palestinian misuse of its educational system to indoctrinate Palestinian youth to hatred and violence should be alarming to anyone who wishes for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Accordingly, United Nations Watch urges the Special Rapporteur on education to identify, report on and strongly condemn incitement in Palestinian education.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Palestinian girl’s goal: “to reach the level” of terrorist who killed 37, PMW (Apr. 14, 2014), http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=157&doc_id=11243.

¹⁵ Names of schools in the PA, PMW (last visited Feb. 21, 2019), <https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=608>.

¹⁶ Nan Jacques Zilberdik, Fatah camp for youth named after murderer, PMW (June 10, 2020), <https://palwatch.org/page/17962>.

¹⁷ COGAT: Hamas summer camp trains kids to ‘commit acts of terror,’ JERUSALEM POST (June 11, 2020), <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/cogat-reports-hamas-summer-camp-back-in-session-595804>; Hamas opens registration for annual summer camp, I24 NEWS (July 15, 2019), <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/1562832005-hamas-launches-annual-summer-camp>; As part of Hamas summer camps, children and youths undergo military and paramilitary training at the military wing’s outposts and facilities, THE MEIR AMIT INTELLIGENCE AND TERRORISM INFORMATION CENTER (Aug. 9, 2018), <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/part-hamas-summer-camps-children-youths-undergo-military-paramilitary-training-military-wings-outposts-facilities/>.

¹⁸ Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik, Fatah and PLO summer camp teaches children to honor arch-terrorists who murdered hundreds, PMW (July 9, 2019), <https://palwatch.org/page/15920>.