UN prevented Erdan from displaying pro-Hitler posts by UNRWA teacher

October 5, 2021

By Tovah Lazaroff

The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/un-prevented-erdan-from-displaying-pro-hitler-posts-by-unrwa-teacher-681064>

UN security personnel stopped Israel's Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan from bringing a display poster into the General Assembly on Monday showing a social media post by a UNRWA teacher which glorified Hitler.

"I see it as a very dangerous precedent here, preventing my freedom of expression, preventing my freedom of speech, and hiding the truth from the UN," Erdan said during his public speech to the UNGA.

He had meant to display the post during a discussion on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees so that he could illustrate his concern about the problem of incitement in UNRWA schools.

"I am shocked because I brought here with me a photo of a UNRWA teacher's post glorifying the most horrific mass murderer in history, Adolf Hitler," Erdan said. "Unfortunately, shockingly, I was prevented from bringing in this photo in order to share this proof with the other distinguished ambassadors here."

A UN spokesperson explained to The Jerusalem Post that UN protocol prevents ambassadors from using props when delivering speeches.

Heads of state, who speak during the high-level opening sessions that take place every September can do so, however, the spokesperson added.

On Monday the UNGA heard a report from UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini about the challenges of servicing 5.7 million Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Lazzarini also addressed allegations of incitement and antisemitism in some of its classrooms and in some social media posts by its staff.

"I am deeply proud of our education system and its resources. UNRWA uses host country curricula in line with best practices in refugee education," Lazzarini said.

The schools teach their pupils about human rights, conflict resolution, tolerance, gender equality and democracy, he said.

"Let's be clear," Lazzarini said, "UNRWA has a zero-tolerance policy for hate speech, incitement, discrimination, hostility or violence.

"I am, however, acutely aware that we are operating in a highly divided and emotionally charged environment where zero risk does not exist," he said.

In his 30 years of humanitarian experience, Lazzarini said, he had never seen an organization that had gone to the lengths that UNRWA has to keep in line with humanitarian values.

"We review all host country textbooks to identify passages that are not in line with UN principles or values," he said. "Any passages that praise violence, whatever the context, are knocked out."

He charged that those who attack UNRWA seek to discredit the agency for political reasons.

"Politically motivated attacks on our education system and more broadly against the agency are increasing in frequency and in aggression," said Lazzarini.

"Those behind these attacks do not have the well-being of Palestinian refugee children at heart," he said, adding that their goal is to delegitimize the agency by eroding the rights of Palestinians.

Erdan, in addressing the UNGA, said that his attack on UNRWA was factual and not political.

"Hamas has built terror tunnels under UNRWA schools and stored weapons. Textbooks used in UNRWA schools have glorified terrorists, called Jews Satan's helpers and display maps that erase Israel," he said.

"UNRWA is part of the problem, not the solution – and the time has come for the International community to hold it accountable."