Report: UK cuts UNRWA funding by more than 50 percent due to incitement

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Britain has cut its funding of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees by a little more than 50 percent, according to a report in The Guardian. Having invested some $57 million in the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in 2020, this amounted to a contribution of $28 million in 2021.

UNRWA commissioner Philippe Lazzarini tied the move to criticism of the Palestinian Authority curriculum used by UNRWA. “The organization is sometimes subjected to vicious political attack, usually through the lens of the curriculum,” he said.

According to Lazzarini, the United Kingdom was the third-largest UNRWA donor in 2020. The agency had started off 2021 with “critical vulnerabilities,” he said.

The move follows the United Kingdom’s decision last month to end all funding to the P.A.

The issue of UNRWA’s curriculum was brought to the public agenda in January when the agency’s head was forced to confirm the findings of a report by IMPACT-se. The research and policy institute found learning materials with UNRWA branding were replete with hatred, anti-Semitism and incitement to jihad and violence, and failed to include any promotion of peace and tolerance in complete violation of United Nations values.

Lazzarini admitted UNRWA had printed and taught “inappropriate” material that was “mistakenly” included in the curriculum in use during the pandemic.

In June, former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the U.K.’s Foreign Office James Duddridge confirmed UNRWA’s curriculum still contained anti-Israel, anti-Semitic material, a situation he said was not acceptable to the parliament or the government.

Speaking before a congressional committee last June, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was “determined that UNRWA pursue very necessary reforms in terms of some of the abuses of the system that have taken place in the past, particularly the challenge that we’ve seen in disseminating in its educational products antisemitic or anti-Israel information.”

In April, the European Parliament became the first legislative body in the world to adopt a resolution formally condemning and demanding the “immediate removal” of content that “incites to hatred in violence in UNRWA’s curriculum.” Canada and Australia also opened official investigations into UNRWA over the hatred and anti-Semitism espoused in the organization’s textbooks this year.

IMPACT-se CEO Marcus Sheff said, “Of course, the obvious remedy would be to remove the hatred and create a curriculum of peace and tolerance instead of inciting and blaming others.  But it is unreasonable for change to happen when responsibility for this remains in UNRWA’s hands. The agency’s teachers themselves create content that is just as radical as that of the Palestinian Authority.”