UNRWA Bluff

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By David Bedein

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In February 2011, producers of the Center For Near East Policy Research’s short film, “FOR THE SAKE OF NAKBA,” which exposed UNRWA incitement the UNRWA school system in the Palestinian Authority, presented that movie for a synagogue in Chicago.

Only a few weeks later, UNRWA dispatched a speaker to that same synagogue to raise funds for a new UNRWA holocaust curriculum that UNRWA announced it was about to implement.

This news of an UNRWA holocaust curriculum seemed rather odd to Arab and Jewish journalists who had covered UNRWA for many years, because they had never heard of any such thing in UNRWA.  However, as news spread of the initiative, US Jewish groups showered praise on UNRWA for its reported desire to sensitize Arab youth to the holocaust. Israeli intelligence also praised UNRWA for the same reason.

The UNRWA rep toured the US at the time and raised an undetermined amount of funds for the UNRWA holocaust education initiative.   However, as reported at the time, there was widespread Palestinian Arab opposition to the UNRWA holocaust education initiative in the UNRWA communities, and the program never came to fruition.

Yet funds raised by UNRWA remained with UNRWA and were allocated to the UNRWA Ministry of Education, which works together with the Palestinian authority – to supply the UNRWA schools with the PA schools with all of the school books.

Arab and Jewish experts of the Center for Near East Policy Research reviewed all PA school books used in UNRWA, and concluded that the UNRWA/PA school system is based on full scale war indoctrination of the 492,000 students who learn in the UNRWA schools in Judea, Samaria, Gaza and Jerusalem.

What became of the UNRWA Holocaust Education Initiative? We asked that of a senior official in the UN who supervises UNRWA. His answer, in writing, was that there was never any plan by UNRWA to implement any holocaust education initiative.(1)

In other words, UNRWA raised funds for a program that never existed and never would exist. Yet UNRWA used it to improve its image in the Jewish community and in Israel.

Between 2011 and 2016, the Center for Near East Policy Research dispatched experts to conduct a briefing each year for staffers and members of the US Congress about the UNRWA war curriculum.

Since the US donates $400 million of the $1.2 billion UNRWA budget, UNRWA was not happy with these briefings and sent a representative to each of these briefings to passionately state that UNRWA runs no war curriculum in its schools, and that UNRWA was devoid of incitement.

The Obama administration kicked in with its own statements on the record that denied the very existence of incitement in the PA/UNRWA schools. (2)

Now UNRWA has changed its tune, after President Trump, very early in his administration, made it known that he would no longer tolerate the current Palestinian school books which promote incitement to war.

Fearful that the new US Administration will cut the US contribution to UNRWA, UNRWA has suddenly changed its message, sending out messages that it has created a peace education curriculum to eradicate the incitement which UNRWA had been saying for years did not exist.

UNRWA went to the trouble of circulating the precise changes that it intended to implement to overhaul the UNRWA curriculum. The Palestinian Authority, contracted by UNRWA as the exclusive supplier of school books to UNRWA, objected to any changes that UNRWA was reportedly offering.

So there will be no PA UNRWA peace education curriculum.

Yet the international and Israeli media universally reporting today that UNRWA is about to implement a peace education curriculum.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

As with the story of the UNRWA Holocaust Education Initiative which never existed, UNRWA spreads the story of a peace education curriculum  –  with no basis in reality.

(1)Published in Jerusalem Post. March 2011

Sir, – Contrary to what you reported in “Palestinians vow to prevent Holocaust education in UNRWA-run schools” (March 2), there is not and has never been a plan for a Holocaust curriculum in any UNRWA school.

When this story first surfaced, almost a year ago, our agency explored every level of the PA’s Ministry of Education, since local UNRWA schools follow the curriculum and use the textbooks of the host entity, as they do in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

We also examined all levels of the UNRWA education department. Michael Kingsley-Nyinah, director of the executive office of UNRWA, replied to our query: “I am writing to clarify that there is no ‘Holocaust curriculum’ as such in UNRWA schools and there are no plans to introduce one.”

There is, however, one aspect of the Palestinian educational system in UNRWA schools that does relate to the Holocaust. In every Palestinian school library, students have easy access to the doctoral thesis written by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas 26 years ago titled “The Other Side: The Secret Relations between Nazism and the Leadership of the Zionist Movement.”

What UNRWA spokespeople have gained by spreading the false notion that they are planning to initiate Holocaust education in their schools is new support and credibility with Jewish groups across the globe.

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(2) In a March 18, 2016 email, the White House spokesperson stated, “***While there is still work to be done, the Palestinian government has made significant progress in reducing inflammatory rhetoric and revising official textbooks. Over the past few years, the PA has helped improve the Palestinian curriculum, including textbooks that discuss human rights and the Holocaust, which has contributed to a better education for young Palestinians. The Palestinian curriculum is transparent, and all textbooks are available for review in Arabic on the website of the official Palestinian Curriculum Development Center. The Government of Israel even approves of and utilizes the Palestinian texts for schools in East Jerusalem***.”

This White House e-mail mentions the fictitious statement that the PA and UNRWA “discuss” the holocaust, which is categorically denied by UNRWA, which has adopted the PA curriculum.