UNRWA schools continue teaching Palestinian children to wage war on Israel

April 24, 2019

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Jewish News Syndicate

<https://www.jns.org/unrwa-schools-continue-to-teach-palestinian-children-to-wage-war-on-israel/>

Elizabeth Campbell, head of the Washington Representative Office for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) wrote a [piece](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/05/opinion/letters/united-nations-aid-palestinians.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share) on April 5 in The New York Times in response to an April 2 [article](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/02/opinion/palestinian-peace-plan-us-aid.html) in the same newspaper by Michael Singh of the Washington Institute of Near East Policy, which characterized UNRWA education as teaching extremism.

Campbell attacked Singh for providing “vague and unsubstantiated criticism” that UNRWA fosters extremism. She called the claim an “old repetition of an untruth,” and asserted that the 715 UNRWA-run regional schools present a positive approach to conflict resolution, tolerance and human rights.

The Center for Near East Policy Research in Jerusalem draws different conclusions. The Center has retained Dr. Arnon Groiss, an expert on Arabic-language education, to examine and translate all Palestinian Authority textbooks used in UNRWA schools ever since the Palestinian Authority began producing its own materials in 2000.

In an interview with Groiss at the Center for Near East Policy Research, he said he was “astonished” to read Campbell’s description of Singh’s criticism as being vague and insubstantial, calling Campbell’s accusation “inaccurate and misleading.”

Up until 1967, Jordan and Egypt oversaw the education of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, respectively. The books were filled with anti-Israel and anti-Semitic material.

In 1967, Israel continued using the same books, yet deleted the obvious anti-Semitic and anti-Israel parts. The Palestinian Authority replaced Egypt and Jordan in ministry of Palestinian education in 1994 and reintroduced the pre-1967, uncensored books. Due to complaints from Israel, the P.A. proceeded to publish 240 of its own textbooks from 2000-06 to form a curriculum meant to be more balanced towards Israel.

Groiss issued a series of reports, from 2000 until 2010, where he evaluated the newer P.A. curriculum and presented his findings to all donor nations, to the P.A. and to UNRWA.

These reports, posted at [www.israelbehindthenews.com](http://www.israelbehindthenews.com/), documented that the new P.A.-UNRWA curriculum carried an extreme anti-Israel message, despite the assurances of the U.S. UNRWA representative Elizabeth Campbell, who used to oversee UNRWA policies for the U.S. State Department.

Groiss said that in 2016, the P.A. issued new textbooks that were even worse, based on three principles: delegitimization of the existence of the State of Israel, which is a full member state of the United Nations; demonization of both Israel and the Jews; and advocacy of a violent struggle for the liberation of all of “Palestine,” including pre-1948 borders, thus wiping Israel off the map.

These books and their curricula are used in first grade through 10th grade in UNRWA-supported Palestinian refugee camps, and are financed by 67 donor nations.

The newest editions of the textbooks do not mention “Israel” even once; instead, the Jewish nation has been replaced with the “Zionist Occupation.”

Fifth-graders, as part of their Islamic-education class, are taught that holy sites like the Western Wall have no connection to Jews: “The Al-Buraq Wall is part of the western wall of Al-Aqsa Mosque and it is an absolute right of the Muslims alone,” instruct the textbooks. In their social-studies textbooks, eighth-grade students are prompted: “Let us think and discuss: I will compare the tragedy of the red-skinned Indians, the original inhabitants of America, and the tragedy of the Palestinian people.” While learning Arabic, ninth-graders read a story that mentions a “barbecue party”—that is, a bus in the Psagot “colony” (a Jewish settlement in the West Bank) being burned by Molotov cocktails (presumably filled with people).

And third-graders are taught in a national/social-upbringing class that Jerusalem has no historical or modern-day connection to Jews: “Jerusalem is an Arab city built by our Arab ancestors thousands of years ago. Jerusalem is a holy city among Muslims and Christians.”

**‘Preparing children for war’**

David Bedein, director of the Center for Near East Policy Research, has conducted extensive research on the operations and motivations of UNRWA in the last 30 years.

He noted that from 1993 to 2000, during the first seven years of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, it was thought that the publishing of school books overseen by the Palestinian Authority was going to be a catalyst for peace.

Instead, Bedein told JNS, he has never once found a Palestinian textbook that promoted peace with Israel—or even mentioned Israel or Israelis in a positive light. Rather, he observed that the books promote a Palestinian state not alongside Israel, but to replace Israel entirely.

He expressed his frustration with UNRWA’s passive stance on the matter, citing an unprecedented U.S. Government Accountability Office report, declassified in February, which concluded that the U.S. State Department had been lying by issuing false assurances that the United States had been preparing peace materials for UNRWA schools.

Bedein discredited UNRWA, saying it is a “U.N. agency preparing children for war.”