UNRWA Head Faces Questions at EU Parliament Over ‘Hate Speech, Violence’ in Palestinian Textbooks

September 1, 2021

The Algemeiner

<https://www.algemeiner.com/2021/09/01/unrwa-head-faces-questions-at-eu-parliament-over-hate-speech-violence-in-palestinian-textbooks/>

Members of the European Parliament pressed the head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Wednesday over reports of incitement to violence and prejudice found in Palestinian textbooks used in it schools.

In a hearing with UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs raised the possibility of greater scrutiny over educational materials used by the UN agency, which serves the descendants of Palestinian refugees from Israel’s 1947-48 War of Independence.

“I have serious concerns regarding the textbooks,” said German MEP Dietmar Köster, from the left-leaning Socialists and Democrats party. “In view of UNRWA’s serious shortcomings in recent years, I believe the European Parliament has no other choice but to discuss the question of whether we need stricter oversight over the agency.”

“Just this April, our very own budgetary discharge report criticized UNRWA for the hate speech and violence taught in UNRWA schools and questioned whether UNRWA has the proper mechanism in place to ensure adherence to UN values,” Köster said.

In June, a [long-awaited European Union analysis](https://www.algemeiner.com/2021/06/18/after-delay-eu-releases-report-detailing-antisemitism-incitement-to-violence-in-palestinian-textbooks/) found that Palestinian Authority textbooks trafficked in antisemitic tropes, removed previously-included references to Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements, and “glorified” as heroes terrorists convicted of killing Israelis.

Köster also cited research from IMPACT-se, an Israel-based nonprofit which studies curricula in the Middle East, that found UNRWA-branded educational materials had included calls to violence and a rejection of peacemaking efforts.

Spanish MEP Jose Ramon Bauza Diaz, of the liberal Renew Europe group, noted that various EU countries have blocked contributions to the UN agency over concerns about its curriculum.

“For this reason, it would be very serious for the money of European taxpayers to pay for encouragement of terrorism or to foster corruption, I would like to ask a very simple question,” he said. “Can you ensure, unequivocally, that UNRWA has not contributed to promote objectives which are contrary to those of the United Nations and the EU?”

In June, EU Commissioner [Oliver Varhelyi suggested](https://www.algemeiner.com/2021/06/22/eu-commissioner-echoes-call-to-condition-funding-of-palestinian-schools-on-removal-of-antisemitism-from-textbooks/) that funding to the agency could be conditioned on Palestinian educational materials adhering to standards of coexistance and non-violence.

At Wednesday’s hearing, Lazzarini agreed that the recent EU-commissioned report raised “a number of issues which need to be addressed,” but insisted that UNRWA takes effective steps to do so.

“We as UNRWA have identified three categories of problems in the textbooks when it comes to being in line with UN value[s], which is age appropriateness, gender perception, and then the issues related to incitement to violence, discrimination, and so on,” he said. “These are the type of issues which have been identified by UNRWA through the review of 150 books and we keep reviewing each of the books being issued by the authorities whenever they need to be used in our class[es]. “

Commenting on the testimony, IMPACT-se CEO Marcus Sheff said that committee members had “made clear that they will resist the European Union becoming a party to radicalizing Palestinian children.”

“UNRWA Commissioner General Lazzarini correctly pointed to the antisemitism, intolerance, and glorification of terrorism in the textbooks, and this is a new development,” Sheff commented. “There must, however, be certainty that these are not taught in UNRWA schools. Sadly, certainty is still greatly lacking.”