

The Myth of Incitement in Palestinian Textbooks
The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education
Response to Allegation against Palestinian Schoolbooks
8 June 2005

Introduction

There has been a flood of accusations for several years over the content of Palestinian textbooks -- that the textbooks incite children to hatred and violence towards Israeli Jews, and fail to promote the values of peace, tolerance and coexistence. This claim has been widely accepted as a fact mostly in the United States and Israeli official circles. Such claims are based on reports by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP), a Jewish organization with links to extremist and racist Israeli groups that advocate settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, expulsion (transfer) of Palestinians from their homeland, and claims that Palestinians are all "terrorists" and that peace with them is not possible. Israel's supporters now are intensifying their orchestrated crusade against Palestinian education in preparation for the House International Relations Committee's planned consideration of the Foreign Relations Authorization bill, FY 2006-2007.

The issue of Palestinian incitement "is going to be a very big issue for Congress as we move ahead to the next few years," said Ester Kurz, legislative strategy and policy director of the influential pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), according to Jewish American paper *The Forward*, 27 May 2005.

Senator Hillary Clinton has continued to criticize Palestinian textbooks since her first Senate campaign. "All future aid to the Palestinian Authority must be contingent on strict compliance with their obligation to change all the textbooks in all grades—not just two at a time," she insisted five years ago. Unfortunately, she fails to realize that leading the campaign against what she calls "new generation of terrorists" is in itself an act of incitement to hate and racism. ("Hillary Clinton: Link PA Aid to End to Anti-Semitism," *Jerusalem Post* 26 September 2000)

A member of the United States Congress wrote to *The New York Times*: "According to the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, today's sixth-grade Palestinian students are required to read the textbook 'Our Country Palestine,' which has a banner on the title page of Volume I that reads, 'There is no alternative to destroying Israel.'" (Steve Israel, letter to *The New York Times*, 10 June 2001, Section 4, p.14). Had Congressman Steve Israel checked his sources before making his declaration, he would have found that there is no such banner in any of the textbooks.

However, in their rush to judgment, some American politicians repeated the allegations without bothering to verify such claims. Thus, and consequently, victimizing the Palestinian people and children further. In the words of Alice Rothchild, co-chair of Visions of Peace with Justice, in a speech given at World Fellowship Center August, 2001: "The campaign of the CMIP has created a self-

fulfilling prophecy that is devastating to the peace movement." And she asked: "What does this tell us about our own stereotypes, racism, power relationships and knee jerk responses?"

Criticism of Palestinian textbooks has been largely based on claims by Israeli government sources and CMIP, whose work has been criticized as "tendentious and highly misleading" by Nathan Brown, Professor of Political Science at George Washington University, and Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who has also published his own studies on this subject. According to Prof. Brown, CMIP's "method was to follow harsh criticisms with quotation after quotation purporting to prove a point...In short, the CMIP reports read as if they were written by a ruthless prosecuting attorney anxious for a conviction at any cost... Exaggerated rhetoric, charges of anti-Semitism and racism, and denial of the significance of existing changes in the curriculum will hardly convince anyone further improvements are worth the effort." (Nathan J. Brown, Getting Beyond the Rhetoric about the Palestinian Curriculum, 1 January 2002)

CMIP's claim that the European Union was funding Palestinian textbooks with anti-Semitic content infuriated Chris Patten, on the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, and External Relations Commissioner. He declared: "It is a total fabrication that the European Union has funded textbooks with anti-Semitic arguments within them in Palestinian schools. It is a complete lie."

And the European Union, responding to the false allegations, issued a statement on 15 May 2002 which asserted that: "Quotations attributed by earlier CMIP reports to the Palestinian textbooks are not found in the new Palestinian Authority schoolbooks funded by some EU Member States; some were traced to the old text books that they are replacing, some to other books outside the school curriculum, and others not traced at all. While many of the quotations attributed to the new textbooks by the most recent CMIP report of November 2001 could be confirmed, these have been found to be often badly translated or quoted out of context, thus suggesting an anti-Jewish incitement that the books do not contain... Therefore, allegations against the new textbooks funded by EU members have proven unfounded."

Allegations Unfounded

The First Palestinian Curriculum Plan of 1998 stated that the principles of the Palestinian curriculum are that Palestine is a democratic state, ruled by a democratic parliamentary system; Palestine is a peace-loving state, working towards international understanding and cooperation based on equality, liberty, dignity, peace and human rights; Palestinian national and cultural identity must be fostered and developed; social justice, equality and the provision of equal learning opportunities for all Palestinians, to the limits of their individual capacity must be ensured without discrimination on grounds of race, religion, color, or gender; opportunities must be provided to develop all Palestinians intellectually, socially, physically, spiritually and emotionally, to become responsible citizens, able to participate in solving problems of their community, their country and the world.

In "A Study of the Impact of the Palestinian Curriculum", commissioned by the Belgian Technical Co-operation at the end of 2004, and conducted by education experts, Dr. Roger Avenstrup and Dr. Patti Swarts, concluded that: "In the light of the debate stirred by accusations of incitement to hatred and other criticisms of the Palestinian textbooks, there is no evidence at all of that happening as a result of the curriculum. What is of great concern to students, teachers and parents alike is that although they wish it, students find it difficult to accept peace and conflict resolution as a solution to the conflict, and teachers find it difficult to teach, while soldiers and settlers are shooting in the streets and in schools and checkpoints have to be braved every day. It would seem that the occupation is the biggest constraint to the realization of these values in the Palestinian curriculum."

In his evaluation of Palestinian Civic Education, Dr. Wolfram Reiss, University of Rostock, Germany, at the Conference on "Teaching for Tolerance, Respect and Recognition in Relation with Religion or Belief," Oslo, 2-5 September 2004, Wrote: "[I]t must be said first that, in general, the Palestinian textbooks cannot be considered a "war curriculum". At least these textbooks of Civics Education convey visions of society, in which tolerance to other religions, human rights, peace, pluralism, democracy and other values are encouraged and fostered much... There is no hatred or incitement against Israel, the Israeli people or Judaism. The textbooks do not contain anti-Semitic language."

Dr. Reiss added that "civics education textbooks do not only avoid hatred and incitement against the West, but foster very much Western values: democracy, human rights, the individual rights, the education for peace and tolerance of all religions, the rights of women and children, the civil society and the protection of nature... From a Western perspective the civics education textbooks therefore have to be highly praised indeed."

Finally, the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), in their June 2004 report, "Analysis and Evaluation of the New Palestinian Curriculum" (30 books for Grades 4 and 9), commissioned by the US Congress and submitted to the Public Affairs Office of the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem, concluded that: "There is, moreover, no indication of hatred of the Western Judeo-Christian tradition or the values associated with it," and that "the textbooks promote an environment of open-mindedness, rational thinking, modernization, critical reflection and dialogue."

The report also confirmed that the textbooks "promote civil activity, commitment, responsibility, solidarity, respecting others' feelings, respecting and helping people with disabilities, and... reinforce students' understanding of the values of civil society such as respecting human dignity; religious, social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and political pluralism; personal, social and moral responsibility; transparency and accountability."

Palestinians welcome having their own textbooks examined and scrutinized from an academic, not prosecutorial stand point, but it is also fair and legitimate to ask those rushing to prosecute to look at Israeli curricula and compare how each side views the "other". Incidentally, the United States Congress has an ongoing program to fund research on Palestinian school books, but is on record as refusing to pay a dime for research on Israeli school books. Concern about Palestinian education and curricula,

however, can gain credibility if it is not seen as blatantly one-sided and totally political.

Education Under Occupation

Roger Avenstrup, who is an international education consultant and has worked in various countries in conflict and post-conflict situations, wrote in the International Herald Tribune, December 18, 2004, that the "biggest constraint, in the words of a Palestinian parent, is that Israeli tanks and soldiers are shooting in the streets outside while teachers are trying to promote peace in the classroom."

Since September 2000, according to the Palestinian State Information Service (SIS), Israel has killed over 4,032 Palestinians, including 750 children; and wounded over 45,000 as of April 30, 2005. Denial of access to medical facilities at checkpoints caused the death of 131 civilians. Of a population of 3.5 million, the Israeli occupation still imprisons 8,500 Palestinians, including 350 minors; 69,843 homes were damaged, 7,438 of those were completely destroyed.

Haim Yavin, Israeli Popular TV Anchor since 1968, commenting in the first segment of a five-part documentary he produced, after listening to settlers insisting that God gave them the lands, admitted: "Since 1967, we have been brutal conquerors, occupiers, suppressing another people... We simply don't view the Palestinians as human beings." And at one point, according to AP report "Yavin shifted the camera toward the Israeli soldiers to ask why they weren't letting people through... 'I look for danger in these people and I can't find it,' Yavin said in the film." (Associated Press, May 31, 2005)

Fouad Moughrabi, director of the Qattan Center for Educational Research and Development, Ramallah, Palestine, wrote, "I find no evidence of brain washing or anti-Jewish incitement in the new texts produced by the PA." He noted that "Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands breeds more hatred and mistrust than any schoolbooks can."

The Convention on the Rights of Child of November 1991, Article 2, obliges State Parties to "respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction." Israel has repeatedly violated these rights and ignored its obligations. In its 20 November 2004 press release, Defense for Children International (DCI), appealed "to the international community and world leaders to abide by their declared commitment to protect the rights of all children, including the children of Palestine. We urge them to bring pressure on the Israeli government, to abide by international law and end the occupation which is incompatible with any declared commitment to promoting and protecting the basic human rights of all."

In the same press release (20 November 2004) DCI reported that: "Since the start of the second Intifada on 29 September 2000, Palestinian children have borne the brunt of the upsurge in Israeli violence. Over the course of the past four years, more than 660 Palestinian children have been killed and almost 9,000 injured – hundreds of whom have been left with permanent physical disabilities. Many thousands more are suffering psychological trauma from the daily horrors they witness. An estimated

3,000 children have been arrested during this Intifada, while currently there are still 335 children being held in Israeli prisons and detention centers."

Israeli Incitement

Those who are critical of what Palestinian children are learning should try to find out how Israeli children are taught to hate Arabs, and trained to kill them.

Israeli daily newspaper Yedioth Ahronot, May 7th 2002, published a letter titled "Dear Soldiers, Please Kill a Lot of Arabs," that came from Israeli children who sent such letters to Israeli soldiers serving in the Tulkarm area during the so-called "Operation Defensive Shield". The letters sent by Israeli school students encouraged soldiers to disregard rules and regulations and to kill as many Arabs as possible. According to "Yedioth Ahronot", dozens of the letters were sent to soldiers, mostly from children in the 7th through 10th grades, attending religious schools.

Egyptian researcher Safa Abdel-Aal studied the Israeli curriculum and media, and published her findings in a new book (in Arabic) entitled Racist Education in the Israeli Curricula in which she found that Israel's educational curricula incite the new generation for war, and racism against the Arabs. Abdel-Aal's book analyses eleven history and five geography books for elementary school from grades three to six.

She thought that these books deliberately paint distorted pictures of the Arabs, giving them such derogatory descriptions as "Arab thieves" or "embezzlers", and referring to Arabs as "bastards, thirsty for Jewish blood" or that they are "underdeveloped Bedouins" and "vagrant highway robbers," and using phrases like "house of Arab reptiles".

Abdel-Aal said that Arabs are maliciously described as murderers and thieves. In one example she quoted the following from one Israeli textbook, "despite a harsh climate and strange environment full of attacks by Arab embezzlers, thieves and terrorists". And in another citation that refers to the city of Tiberias where "a feeling of insecurity and fear of the Arab murderers spread among the residents of the city."

Ruth Firer and Sami Adwan, an Israeli and a Palestinian scholar, who conducted research comparing Palestinian and Israeli textbooks, March 2002, wrote that the Israeli books "strongly emphasizing the collective values connected to the history of the Jewish nation in 'their land' and God's promises to the Jews that give them an absolute right on the land. The land of Eretz Israel described in the books includes the territories of the PNA from 1967."

A study by Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel-Aviv University reviewed 124 Hebrew language books approved for use in 1994 by the Ministry of Education. The study concludes that "the majority of [Israeli school] books stereotype Arabs negatively." In one children's book, Bar-Tal offers this sampling, "We were lonely... pioneers surrounded by a sea of enemies and murderers." In elementary school books, according to Bar-Tal, Arabs are often stereotyped negatively and portrayed as "uneducated people and enemies."

In a report titled "Israeli Textbooks and Children's Literature Promote Racism and Hatred toward Palestinians and Arabs," journalist Maureen Meehan concluded that "Israeli school textbooks as well as children's storybooks, portray Palestinians and Arabs as 'murderers,' 'rioters,' 'suspicious', and generally backward and unproductive. Direct delegitimization and negative stereotyping of Palestinians and Arabs are the rule rather than the exception in Israeli schoolbooks." (Washington Report for Middle East Affairs September 1999)

In a study presented at the hearing of the political committee of the European Parliament, 24 October 2003, titled "The attitude towards Palestinians in Israeli textbooks," Dr. Nurit Elhanan, of the Hebrew University, revealed that "the Palestinians are absent from all textbooks, The Occupation is never mentioned, and the area where Palestinians live is presented in the maps either as an empty space referred to as 'an area without data' (Man and Space maps) or it is incorporated into the state of Israel (The Geography of the land of Israel maps). In both cases use of the term 'occupation' is out of the question, since you cannot occupy illegally what is yours anyway and you cannot occupy illegally an empty space."

Dr. Elhanan added: "When reference is made to date in the West Bank it is only to Jewish colonies or to main cities like Nablus, Hebron or Beth Lehem as Israeli tourist sites...In Israel today there is already a second generation of children who don't know there are occupation, illegal domination and illegal settlements."

A report by an Israeli research institution, The New Profile, entitled Child Recruitment in Israel, 29 July 2004, by: Amir Givol, Neta Rotem, Sergei Sandler, (worth quoting at length here) reveals the extent of the militarization of the Israeli education system. It states:

"To begin with, militarised education naturally feeds on the militarism prevalent in society at large. In a country where various kinds of weaponry are permanently displayed in public places and the status of the military is used to promote anything from cheese to political candidates, militarised education comes natural. One absorbs militarism at home and on the street. The military is physically present in schools and school activities. Soldiers in uniform are stationed in schools, many of them are actually teaching classes. Other teachers, and especially principals, are recently retired career officers, without proper teacher training. High schools normally have a display on one of the walls in the school building with the names and photographs of "the fallen" among their graduates. School field trips, at all ages, are often made to military memorials set up on former battlegrounds.

"Official curricula and textbooks also reflect the militaristic attitudes inherent in the Israeli educational system, all the way from kindergarten to the last years of high school, where there is a mandatory programme for all Jewish state-run schools called "preparation for the IDF," that in most cases includes actual military training. Whole curricular subjects are often described to the pupils, and in official documents, as having the aim of preparing pupils, or some of them, to military service. Glorifications of the military and military conquest, and negative or skewed representation of Palestinians, are to be found in many Israeli textbooks."

Conclusion

Palestinian opposition to Israel must be understood in the context of their opposition to Israeli occupation and oppression, their quest for freedom and self-determination, self preservation, and national liberation. Ruth Firer, of the Hebrew University, who carried out research on Palestinian textbooks was quoted in an Americans for Peace Now published interview as saying "we were surprised to find how moderate the anger directed toward Israelis in the Palestinian textbooks is, compared to the Palestinian predicament and suffering."

Experience has shown that changes in school textbooks and syllabi are not at all the necessary ingredients for the fulfillment of a meaningful peace agreement between states in conflict, but rather the sincere will and commitment of both parties for achieving such an agreement, and the environment the population has to live in. For over fifty years Palestinians have tried reconciliation and compromise. They accepted a state on 22 percent of their original country for the sake of peace and security, through the Palestine National Council Conference of 1988 in Algiers, and accepted all U.N. resolutions regarding the Palestinian issue.

In 1993 the PLO signed the Oslo Agreement which called for ending the Israeli occupation and implementing the two-state solution. The Israelis responded by expanding settlement activities, in violation of international law and the Oslo Agreements at a frantic rate, with more violence, more land expropriation and house demolitions, incitement, demonization, and eventually the cantonization of the Palestinian population in apartheid-like ghettos. More recently, the apartheid Wall, which was condemned by the International Court of Justice at The Hague and by the international community, has added to the inciting nature of measures taken by the Israeli government against the Palestinian population under occupation.

As long as Israel continues to look for excuses to smoke-screen its brutal military occupation, and to deny the Palestinians' self-determination, freedom, and human rights, in violation of international law and all U.N. resolutions, the conflict will continue. Palestinians need peace more than any other nation on earth, but peace must be based on mutual respect and justice for all.