



CENTER FOR MONITORING

THE IMPACT OF PEACE (R.A.)

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The New Palestinian Authority School Textbooks - November 2000

BACKGROUND:

Until the academic year 2000-2001 the schoolbooks used by the Palestinian Authority [PA] were primarily Jordanian and Egyptian books that were republished by the PA and this was the reason, PA officials contended, for the offensive content against Jews and Israel. In addition, the PA was in the process of producing new textbooks, with the help of the international community, notably Italy and UNESCO, which would be different and void of offense against the Jews and Israel.

This claim seemed to be genuine in view of the fact that the "First Palestinian Curriculum for General Education" published in 1997 by the Palestinian Curriculum Development Center contained positive references to the peace process and to Israel. On the one hand this document noted that "the change from a situation of war and armed opposition to coexistence with the peoples of the region, particularly with the Israeli people, requires the crystallization of an educative philosophy" (p. 620), and on the other, that the Palestinians had "to use the experience and efforts of all peoples, including the Israeli people...to negotiate without political or ideological fanaticism, and...to appreciate the efforts of scientists, no matter their sex or religion. The daily experience of the Palestinian people has proven that the Israeli agriculture and industry has had a positive effect upon Palestinian agriculture and industry." (p. 626)

In September 2000 the PA Ministry of Education issued 14 new textbooks for grades 1 and 6, written by "The Center for Developing the Palestinian Curricula". The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace [CMIP] has reviewed these first Palestinian- produced school textbooks and the following are CMIP findings.

THE NEW BOOKS:

CMIP has found that the new Palestinian schoolbooks make no attempt to educate for peace and coexistence with Israel. Indeed, the opposite is true and the following are some of the main findings of the PA books.

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- Peace with Israel is not presented as a goal or discussed as an option. The peace process is not referred to in the school books. The Oslo Accords are mentioned once, but are not defined as a peace process, rather as a point in time connected to the forces of the PLO's return to "Palestine".
- The books continue to instruct de-legitimization of Israel. Israel is defined as foreign to the Middle East and is categorized as a colonialist conqueror, which occupied Palestine in 1948, similar to colonialist Britain, which occupied Palestine in 1917.
- The books continue to teach non-recognition of Israel. Israel's name does not appear on any regional map and Israel's land is included in the state of "Palestine". These maps appear in Language, National Education and Science books.
- Israel is mentioned only in contexts that breed contempt, such as having expelled and massacred Palestinians.
- Every reference to Israeli cities, regions and geographic areas identifies them as part of "Palestine". This includes verbal and/or visual references, chapters or study sections of the following Israeli areas: Jaffa [southern part of Aviv-Jaffa Municipality], Acre, Beer Sheva, the Negev [southern region of Israel] the Kinneret [Sea of Galilee]. The economic activities in the Negev are presented in a context implying it is a part of "Palestine".
- The section on Palestinian society's "Particular Problems" teaches about Israel's creation and occupation of "Palestine" in 1948. The books do not define the "problem" in terms of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the territories administered by Israel since 1967 and perceived by the international community to be the essence of the Palestinian "problem". This is most significant and has far-reaching educational implications that the PA is teaching their children that the Palestinian "problem" is not Israel's control over the West Bank and Gaza, but Israel's existence.
- The Islamic education compounds the problem. After teaching that Israel has conquered Palestine in other books, the Islamic Education book instructs that "defense of the Islamic homeland is a mandatory religious obligation for every Muslim if a centimeter is stolen from his land. I am a Muslim Palestinian. I love my land Palestine." [Islamic Education, grade six p. 67] After defining all of Israel as conquered Palestine, teaching children of their religious obligation to every "centimeter" of "Palestine" is implicitly calling for Israel's destruction. In addition, citing the Islamic obligation to defend "stolen" land and relating it to Israel has the dangerous effect of placing a religious dimension on the nationalistic conflict.
- A chapter in "National Education for Grade Six" is dedicated to "Tolerance", yet the PA schoolbook does not mention Jews or Israelis in the entire chapter. A prominent picture shows a Christian shaking hands with a Muslim.
- In all grades other than first and sixth, the old schoolbooks with anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric, including overt calls for Israel's destruction, continue to be used. As yet, the PA has rejected international calls to modify these books.

A few changes were noted in the new PA books. The open calls for Israel's destruction found in the previous books are no longer present. However, given the de- legitimization of Israel's existence, together with teachings such as the obligation to defend Islamic land, the seeking of Israel's destruction has merely been shifted from the explicit to the implicit.

Another change is that certain overtly anti-Semitic references defining Jews and Israelis as "treacherous" or "the evil enemy", common in the previous books, are likewise not present. However, given the books' portrayal of Israel as a foreign

colony that massacred and expelled Palestinians, the defamation of Israel continues even if the word "enemy" has been removed.

One interesting development is the inclusion of reference to Jews, praising the role Jews and Christians played in the medieval world in the transmission of knowledge. This is noteworthy because the previous curriculum did not include even one positive reference to a single Jew in any of the books. However, the same section includes the teaching that Mohammed had his personal aide learn the language of the Jews "in order to be safe from their deceit". [History of the Arabs and Muslims, grade 6, p. 133]

FINDINGS:

Ever since the PA became responsible for education in 1994, Palestinian children have been learning from their school books to identify Israelis as the evil colonialist enemy who stole their land. This education is continuing in the new PA curriculum, even if the words "evil" and "enemy" have been expunged.

The new PA schoolbooks fail to teach their children to see Israel as a neighbor with whom peaceful relations are expected. They do not teach acceptance of Israel's existence on the national level, nor do they impart tolerance of individual Jews on the personal level. Instead of working to erase the prevalent hateful stereotypes, the new PA curriculum is engraining them into the next generation's consciousness. The lone positive mention of Jews in the transfer of knowledge in a 1200-year old historical setting will have little bearing on promoting tolerance of Jews and Israelis today, given the active contempt encouraged in all other contexts in the schoolbooks.

A concerted effort will be necessary to undo past negative stereotyping if peace is to be sought and ultimately cemented between the people. A progressive peace curriculum would include positive references to Jews and Israelis as people, would include Israel on maps, and would acknowledge 3000 years of Jewish history, including the Jewish nation's historical rights in the Land of Israel. Failing this, the next generation of children will grow up to see as the enemy to be confronted rather than as a neighbor to live beside. The full report of CMIP's finding can be found [here](#)