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Abbas is right - Education can incite

Mahmoud Abbas is right - education can incite. In which case, he may want to take a closer look at what Palestinian children are learning in their classrooms



Wars begin in the minds of men



Nir Boms and Yael Teff-Seker

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Mahmoud Abbas's recent speech in the UN included a reference to the inciting Israeli books that encouraged the latest surge of violence committed by Jewish settlers aimed at hurting Palestinian citizens.

This violence "is the inherent byproduct of the racist climate" claimed Abbas, "fueled by a culture of incitement in the Israeli curriculum and extremist declarations, which are rife with hatred and are rooted in a series of discriminatory laws created and enacted over the years against the Palestinian people".

There is no doubt that violent attacks by settlers against Palestinians are wrong and must be prevented and punished. But while Abbas's claim that a racist cultural climate is to blame is debatable, his attack on Israel's curriculum is unjustified at its core.

Israel's educational curriculum – the official approved textbooks by Israel's ministry of education – actually includes an overwhelming amount of messages that vehemently oppose racism and violence towards our Palestinian neighbours.

Two new reports published by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE) demonstrate that official textbooks support peace as the optimal solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict. They include poems and literary texts that call for peace and praise it (among them poems by Palestinian authors) and argue that violence, let alone unorganized illegal violence, is always wrong.

Take for example a quote from the history textbook *On the Way to Resurrection and Peace – Episodes in the History of Israel in the 20th Century*, which was published in 1999, during the early Oslo years. We see the following paragraph written by the authors regarding the peace process with the Palestinians:

These negotiations are progressing with great difficulty. We hope that they will succeed, we hope that we will finally achieve peace with all of the Arab states. And peace will come to Israel. (P. 263)

Another quote featured in a civics textbook (*Being Citizens in Israel: A Jewish and Democratic State*, p. 348) bears the same message:

[...] It is not enough to have peace with Egypt and Jordan. As part of negotiations with the Palestinians we must add more and accept the fact that they are a separate national entity. It is not enough to have partial, fragmented peace. In order to lift the threat off of Israel's future, there is a need for full peace. [...]

Poems and other excerpts promoting peace are often included in literature anthologies, such as *The Way of Words* (2006, Book 6, p. 264), where we find the poem *If I Will Come Upon the Mine of Peace* by the Palestinian author Ghassan Abd al-Rahman Yusuf Sarsur:

If I will come upon the mine of peace - / I will go into it and I will quarry the precious delicacy of "peace", / I would spread it among men – and peace will survive everywhere [...]. We will shake each other's hand held out in peace, / So that we will live a life of happiness and those who will come – / Please come, come together, come!

Sadly, a similar search in Palestinian textbooks did not uncover equivalent quotes. The newest Palestinian textbooks hardly acknowledge the existence of the State of Israel. Take, for example, this quote taken from the Al-Sham grade five history books, stating that "The Levant countries presently consist of the states of Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria." Israel remains absent in the vast majority of textbook maps as well.

Other books, especially those issued by the Palestinian Waqf (Ministry of Religious Affairs), demonize Jews and encourage Shahada (martyrdom) and Jihad (holy war). In the book *Religious Affairs* issued by the Waqf, it is written that:

Today the Muslim states need Jihad and Jihad warriors urgently in order to free the robbed territories and get rid of the thieving Jews in the robbed lands of Palestine and the Levant". (p. 12).

Even textbooks authorized by the Palestinian Ministry of Education include statements such as the following passage: "*Palestine is the land of Ribat [holy land] and Jihad*" (in *Arab Language: Reading, Literature and Criticism*, p. 108), and grammar exercises asking the students to connect the two following phrases: "A morning of glory and red redemption, fed by the blood of the martyrs" and "Hope for the liberation of Palestine" (in *Reading and Texts*, Part 1, p. 20-21, 24).

When Abbas claims that the Palestinians foster a culture of peace while the policy of the state of Israel is that of war and occupation, he might want to take a better look at what Palestinian children are learning in their classrooms.

Since the Palestinians have recently joined UNESCO, the United Nation's education arm, Abbas might wish to be reminded of its preamble: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." A culture of peace begins with mind of the young. Unfortunately, a culture of war begins at the very same place.

Yael Teff Seker is the head of research and Dr. Nir Boms is a board member at the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE)

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