UN funding perpetuates Palestinian narratives

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The annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly, with its dozens of speeches by presidents, prime ministers and other dignitaries, has concluded. But there is trouble ahead relating to UN expenditures to fund various, notoriously biased bodies.

The UN will now return to its usual business, much of it devoted to perpetuating the Palestinian narrative, at UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in Paris, at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, and others of its agencies. The politicization of the UN system, especially when it comes to defaming and delegitimizing Israel, continues to degrade the organization’s original mission.

In recent weeks, the Trump administration’s cutoff of funds to UNRWA (UN Relief Works Agency) pending the reform of that bloated and biased organization, has grabbed international attention. Over decades, it has exhorted Palestinians to see Jews and Israel through an antisemitic lens, and to believe that all Palestinians will one day “return” to the entirety of what is now Israel. And rather than promoting peace and reconciliation, it has cooperated with terrorist organizations, particularly in Gaza, that seek Israel’s destruction.

UNRWA does its business in the Middle East, but it is in New York where the brain trust of this effort is situated. In the wake of the infamous 1975 Zionism=Racism resolution adopted by the General Assembly, came the so-called Palestinian committees and division, specifically established and funded by the UN to advance the Palestinian political agenda. The Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights (DPR) exist for the singular purpose of promoting an anti-Israel message worldwide – in the name of the UN.

Indeed, CEIRPP sponsors conferences and photo exhibitions worldwide, which demean Israel and promote “the return” of all Palestinians. There are 26 countries that sit on the committee, including Malaysia, Bolivia and Venezuela. Twenty-four countries sit in as observer states, including many members of the Arab League.

The DPR, housed within the UN Secretariat (the only people to be so recognized), is staffed full-time by UN employees, and has been charged with assisting CEIRPP on a day-to-day basis to advance its mission. Its entire budget is paid by the UN for the purpose of engaging in the worldwide dissemination of Palestinian anti-Israel propaganda. So much for the UN being a member of the Quartet (together with the United States, Russia and the European Union), which was ostensibly organized to promote negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and not be a partisan for one side over the other.

The DPR uses the UN’s Department of Public Information and its 63 information centers around the word to get its anti-Israel message out. Among the programs of the DPR, as listed on its website are: “[Organizes] international meetings and conferences in various regions and encourages the participation of all sectors of the international community. These meetings and conferences ‘are to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people.’”

JUST HOW the DPR uses the system is revealed in this point from the website: “Annual training programs are conducted for the staff of the Palestinian Authority, getting staff of the PA to acquire professional expertise in the various aspects of the work of the United Nations and multilateral diplomatic work.”

Is it any wonder, with this kind of infrastructure in the world’s most important multilateral organization, the Palestinians have no incentive to negotiate with Israel?

The annual budget for both CEIRPP and the DPR comes to over $6 million. But if you add in the value of the work done by the DPI to advance the agenda of these two bodies, the amount is substantially higher. Rather than an investment in peace, which the UN set up business to do in 1945, this financial support by UN member-states has exacerbated the conflict, not helped to resolve it. It has enabled and supported full-throated expressions of the most extreme positions on the Palestinian side, including intentionally misleading millions of Palestinians to believe that they will return to what is now Israel and demographically overwhelm its Jewish population.

Might it not be better to take the funds and channel the money into programs like micro-financing for Palestinian women, or other economic-empowerment projects that would give people a stake in a peaceful future?

The UN budget is approved for two years, with the next one to be presented in 2019. The General Assembly does, however, extend the mandates and the funding authorizations for the Palestinian committee and division annually, and that vote will come up in November. Over the past few years, it’s been a mixed voting bag. For DPR and CEIRPP the no votes went up slightly, as did the yes votes, while abstentions held steady. The special committee was most dramatic with a fall to only 83 yes votes last year.

But nothing would strike a more resounding note for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than eliminating these centers of rejectionism and hate. As long as the Palestinians feel they have the international wind at their back – including the use of the UN system as their private public relations mechanism – all talk of a serious “peace process” will continue to fall on deaf ears among Palestinians and their supporters in the international community.

Indeed, while the PA leadership speaks in one way about a two-state solution, its activity in the UN says something entirely different. UNRWA, CEIRPP and the DPR, by promoting the Palestinian “right of return” as the main element of their programs, suggest an objective of a one-state solution, in which the demise of the Jewish state is achieved by the mathematics of demography.

Many countries speak, oftentimes in rote pronouncements, about the need for peace in the region. Voting “no” next month at the UN on continued authorization of the Palestinian committees would be a good way for them to “walk the walk.”