Bipartisan bill urges Congress to publish annual report on PA incitement

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A bipartisan bill has been proposed in Congress that would require the secretary of state to submit annual reports reviewing the educational material used by Palestinian Authority and UNRWA schools in Palestinian territories.

The bill was introduced last Thursday by Reps. Brad Sherman (D-CA) and Lee Zeldin (R-NY) is cosponsored by four other congressional representatives, two from each party.

In 2016 and 2017, the PA published modified curriculums for school-aged children in grades one through 11. “The new Palestinian curriculums fail to meet the international standards of peace and tolerance in educational materials established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” the bill states. “Textbooks used by the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA encourage war, and teach children that Palestinian statehood can be achieved through violence.”

The legislation also includes a sense in Congress that the PA and UNRWA have not eliminated content that encourages violence, antisemitism, hate and intolerance toward other nations or ethnic groups from the curriculums used in their schools.
The proposed legislation is a result of a report by Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) which monitors values of peace and tolerance in textbooks across the Middle East from Tunisia to Saudi Arabia, including Israel and the Palestinian territories. “We have spent a lot of time over the last three years focusing on the PA new curriculum,” IMPACT-se CEO Marcus Sheff told The Jerusalem Post.

“We have been looking at it since 2000, and we were hoping this was going to be an opportunity to improve the standards of peace and tolerance in the textbooks. Unfortunately, the opposite was true.”

According to Sheff, these books have a significant impact on children’s education because there is just one book per grade per subject. “There are 173 books in the curriculum, and that is what the teachers have to teach. They are incredibly powerful. They have an authority which other forms of communication do not have. They have the seal of the PA, [and] it is obvious to students that this is a national identity which has been passed down by the Palestinian Authority. And students take it very seriously.”
Sheff told the Post that after examining the new curriculum, he came to the conclusion that “there is a very definite strategy by the Palestinian Authority to radicalize, to a far greater extent than before, the 1.3 million children who go to the PA and UNRWA schools.”

For example, he said, “Ideas of peace treaties with Israel, peace talks, attempts at reconciliation and the two-state solution have been taken out. Ideas which existed before have been taken out. The ideas which are now in are more radical than ever, which means that the concepts of the martyrdom of jihad of sacrifice, you see them throughout the curriculum across all grades and all subjects. If you are going to teach math to nine-year-old by saying count the number of martyrs, and the first thing to father and the numbers of shahidim [martyrs] in the Second Intifada, how many shahidim do you have? Then I think it is very clear that every opportunity is being used by the PA to put the idea of martyrdom into the minds of young people.”

Following the introduction of the new legislation the Anti-Defamation League tweeted, “Resolving the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians requires teaching all children to be tolerant. ADL welcomes the bipartisan introduction of the Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act and commends IMPACT-se for its important work.”