UN Secretary General Defends UN Agency That Teaches One Palestine “River to Sea”

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The spokesperson for United Nations Secretary General António Guterres issued a statement on Monday on behalf of the Secretary General strongly defending the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The statement defended UNRWA against what the Secretary General considered to be unfair criticism. The statement expressed the Secretary General’s “support for UNRWA and his admiration for the role it plays in delivering essential services and protecting the rights of millions of Palestine refugees across the Middle East.”

The Secretary General, through his spokesperson, bestowed special praise for UNRWA’s supposed contributions to the education of Palestinian children. It “provides education for half a million refugee girls and boys, teaching them human rights and tolerance,” the Secretary General spokesperson’s statement said.

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In point of fact, UNRWA teaches hate against Jews in the schools it runs. It also bent to pressure from Hamas and the Palestinian Authority by abandoning plans to change textbooks it uses in its schools that contain maps showing a “Palestine” that runs from river to sea.

Hamas Legislative Council member ‘Atef ‘Adwan, for example, had objected that UNRWA had no authority to make curricular changes: “The organization’s interference contradicts its fundamental mission, [which is] to provide aid to the [Palestinian] refugees… and aims to please the donor countries.” (MEMRI, April 6, 2017)  Amal Al-Battash, deputy head of the UNRWA workers union, said that her union was “not going to allow the implementation of this plot against the Palestinian people.” She claimed the proposed changes would “distort the Palestinian history, geography, and beliefs.”

An announcement on the Palestinian Authority’s Education Ministry’s website stated that “any change to the Palestinian curriculum is tantamount to a flagrant violation of the host country’s laws” and that “changing even a single letter in the curriculum in order to appease some element or other is tantamount to betraying the Palestinian narrative and the right of the occupied Palestinian people to maintain its identity and its struggle.”

In the face of such pressure, UNRWA folded. Its Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl said that “in conformity with its practice since the 1950s based on an agreement with UNESCO, UNRWA teaches host-country curricula in its schools.” (MEMRI, April 28, 2017)

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In other words, despite the Palestinian Authority’s claim to support a two-state solution and to recognize the state of Israel, it aligned itself with the terrorist Hamas organization in demanding that the United Nations teach in its schools the fictional narrative of one Palestine from river to sea, as if Israel did not exist at all. In bowing to the Palestinians’ wishes, UNRWA is thereby aiding and abetting the undermining of the two-state solution the UN professes to support.

Moreover, acceding to such pressure from the Palestinian hate-mongers does not advance lessons on “human rights and tolerance” that the Secretary General’s defense of UNRWA claimed UNRWA was teaching.

I asked the Deputy Spokesperson why the Secretary General had not at least reflected concern about UNRWA’s participation in an educational program for children that undermines the very principle of a two‑state solution that he and the UN in general have espoused so consistently. In response, the Deputy Spokesperson said, “the relationship between UNRWA and its host is an issue that’s complex. What they try to do in the places where they operate is to encourage the instruction of tolerance, and they do try to teach messages of tolerance in all the curricula in the countries where they operate.”  He repeated this tripe several times.

UNRWA should be forced to make a choice. Either show some backbone and not participate in advancing a curriculum in its schools that directly contradicts the two-state solution the UN claims it supports, or lose all funding from the United States, by far its biggest contributor.