UNRWA’s Message of Hate and Indoctrination

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#### By Deborah Singer Soffen and Joan Lurie Goldberg

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The education of Palestinian schoolchildren must change drastically if there is ever to be a lasting negotiated peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. Why? Because these schools have been inciting three generations of young Palestinians to hate and kill Jews, and the only means of conflict resolution that these students have been exposed to is violence.

For children all over the world, the new school year is filled with promise and excitement, affording them the opportunity for personal development so that they may eventually become productive citizens of their perspective communities. The same cannot be said for Palestinian children. The United Nations’ Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA and the Palestinian leadership have manipulated their education system to serve a different purpose. Rather than an education that strives to better the child, they exploit impressionable minds, indoctrinating these children into a culture of hate, thereby perpetuating the conflict rather than resolving it. Until their education system changes, the region is at least a generation away from a true, sustainable peace.

Palestinian schools, including various private schools belonging to Christian churches and Islamic charity foundations, all receive their textbooks from the PA Ministry of Education’s Curricula Center in Ramallah.

According to Dr. Arnon Groiss, whose research on the subject spans 18 years, the most recent set of books published in 2016/2018 are even more radical than their predecessors. According to him, a curriculum of hatred permeates all subject matter, from elementary arithmetic to high school social studies and science. Martyrdom is glorified, the Jews’ historical connection to their biblical homeland is rejected, and contemporary maps of the region omit the existence of the UN member state of Israel. Jews are demonized and terrorist/jihad concepts are woven into songs, plays, and academia.

“The Right of Return” for more than five million Palestinians, clearly an attempt to destroy the State of Israel, is taught as a birthright. “Summer camps” for UNRWA students in Gaza are essentially Hamas paramilitary training programs. It is nothing short of hair-raising to see an adorable schoolgirl demonstrate the best way to stab a Jew or hear a young schoolboy say that he dreams of one day becoming a martyr.

UNRWA was set up in 1949 to provide social services, including education, to the Palestinian refugee population that resulted following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, which occurred when the newly declared State of Israel was attacked by its Arab neighbors.

The agency’s schools now employ 30,000 teachers, many of whom are products of these same incitement-filled schools. Therefore, it should be no surprise that peace in the region has been so elusive. Nor should it be a surprise that there have been so many teenage Palestinians attending these schools who have been willing to sacrifice their lives in order to murder Jews.

This phenomenon of a society indoctrinating children is eerily similar to that of the Hitler Youth. The Nazis employed propaganda, hate-filled rhetoric, rabid antisemitism, paramilitary training, and the concept of self-sacrifice for the cause in order to ensure that there would be a crop of new young soldiers at the ready to feed the Third Reich. To quote Hitler, “He alone who owns the youth gains the future.”

It has been a monumental error in judgement to ignore the fact that UNRWA has been complicit in allowing a hate-filled education system to function unfettered in its schools all these years. If this indoctrination had been properly addressed decades ago, we would likely not be in the situation we are in today, faced with a population of Palestinians educated in UNRWA schools (for which the US was the major donor) unwilling to even consider a peaceful resolution to a conflict that has cost far too many innocent lives and benefits no one — certainly not Palestinians.

The indoctrination of impressionable children in a racist, violent ideology that encourages martyrdom puts a child’s personal well-being in jeopardy. In fact, the Palestinian education system meets the definition of child abuse as outlined by a number of organizations. For example:

“The Convention of the Rights of the Child,” ratified by the UN General Assembly in 1989, recognizes and urges respect for the human rights of children. In particular, Article 19 calls for legislative, administrative, social, and educational actions to protect children from all forms of violence.

The International Criminal Court has recognized that “conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 and using them to participate actively in hostilities” is a war crime.

The World Health Organization’s definition of “Child Abuse and Neglect” includes  “exploitation which results in actual or potential harm to a child’s health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.”

Dr. Groiss published a comparative study in July 2018 entitled, “The Attitude of the ‘Other’ and to Peace in Israeli and Palestinian Schoolbooks.” In it he concludes “the Israeli schoolbooks are distinctively better than their Palestinian counterparts as far as their attitude to the rival ‘other’ and to the issue of peaceful resolution of the present conflict is concerned. In fact, the PA books do not yet constitute a peace curriculum while the Israeli ones fairly meet that challenge.”

Whether UNRWA continues to function or ceases to exist, a change in Palestinian schools is long overdue. We will need to remain vigilant to ensure that, whatever entity assumes responsibility for the education of these children, real and verifiable reforms are put in place.

UNRWA may have lost its US funding, but the Palestinian leadership has not lost its desired goal of seeking Israel’s demise. If tolerance is to prevail over hate, the PA Ministry of Education’s schoolbooks must be rewritten, removing all hateful incitement and incorporating a peaceful curriculum. Those teachers culpable in indoctrinating their students must be retrained or replaced with appropriately trained teachers. A system of accountability and oversight must be instituted. If not, we have not taken heed from lessons learned from Nazi Germany, and a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians will remain elusive.