

**Special report:  
Canadian governmental funding and  
UNRWA's breach of its duty of neutrality**

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**Executive summary**

As the UN just extended the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and as the Canadian-UNRWA cooperation agreement approaches its three year anniversary, this report will focus on the field of education and examine whether UNRWA is meeting its obligations to Canada.

In 2010, the Canadian government discontinued its support for UNRWA amid fears that the Canadian government had insufficient ability to ensure that the aid was being used for its designated purpose.

In April 2017, the new Canadian government signed the "Framework for Cooperation between Global Affairs Canada and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)" [Hereinafter: "The framework agreement"]. The framework agreement provided the platform for the renewal of Canadian funding of UNRWA.

The framework agreement stipulated that UNRWA is bound by its duty to maintain neutrality. Particular stress was placed on UNRWA constantly reviewing the schoolbooks that it uses in its schools to ensure that the teaching staff adhered to the duty of neutrality and that the materials taught met that standard.

Canada, in a demonstration of trust in UNRWA, did not create an independent review process. Instead, the framework agreement created a procedure in which UNRWA was appointed as the watchdog of its own activities, with heavy reliance placed on UNRWA's Annual Operational Report.

Unfortunately, undermining the goodwill and peace promoting intentions of Canada, the content, but more specifically the missing content, of UNRWA's 2017 and 2018 Annual Operational Reports demonstrates how the Canadian government's faith in UNRWA was abused.

This report will focus on UNRWA's flagrant and conscious breach of its duty of neutrality by its use of the schoolbooks, published in 2017, by the Palestinian Authority. The breaches were well documented by UNRWA itself and made public by the Palestinian media.

The media reports, from March and November 2017, show how UNRWA recognizes that the PA schoolbooks breach its duty of neutrality. While UNRWA raised these issues with the PA, the PA rejected them all and demanded that UNRWA continue using the schoolbooks. In both instances, UNRWA capitulated to the PA.

The reports further show that the PA does not truly care about respecting UNRWA's neutrality and is even willing to see hundreds of thousands of Palestinian students lose their educational framework if UNRWA dares to attempt to maintain its duty of neutrality and meet the terms of the Canadian-UNRWA framework agreement.

UNRWA's continued acceptance of PA terms does not promote peace or Israeli-Palestinian co-existence. Rather it fuels the flames of the conflict and ensures that another generation of Palestinian youth is growing up into an environment of hate and incitement to violence and one in which Israel's existence and very right to exist is denied.

The problematic nature of the PA school curriculum and textbooks has been the subject of much criticism. In 2019 alone, both the UK and the US initiated legislation on the subject. The EU, following the lead of the UK, initiated an extensive study of the curriculum and the textbooks, while Norway threatened to cut funding. Even a UN committee expressed concern "About the existence of hate speech in certain media outlets, especially those controlled by Hamas, social media, public officials' statements and school curricula and textbooks, which fuels hatred and may incite violence."

Despite the damning findings regarding the school books, and the glaring fact that their contents breaches UNRWA's duty of neutrality and, accordingly, the Canadian-UNRWA framework agreement, since signing the agreement, Canada has committed \$110 million in support for UNRWA.

To rectify these fundamental problems that continue to undermine peace and undermine Canada's goals, five steps should be taken by the Canadian government:

1. Require that UNRWA explain why the agency concealed and failed to report the content of the PA schoolbooks and the ensuing breach of the framework agreement.

2. Amend the 2017 framework agreement by adding Canada's own periodical independent review of UNRWA's practices.
3. Undertake an independent study of the PA schoolbooks used in UNRWA schools.
4. Inform UNRWA that in future Canada expects the agency to take all steps necessary in order to fully meet its obligations.
5. Inform the PA that the use of its new textbooks in UNRWA schools forces the organization to breach its duty of neutrality and jeopardizes Canadian aid to the Agency.

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## **Background**

In April 2017, the Canadian Government signed the “[Framework for Cooperation between Global Affairs Canada and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East \(UNRWA\)](#)”<sup>1</sup>. The framework agreement provided for the renewal of Canadian funding of UNRWA.

Among other stipulations, the framework agreement included references to “implementation of UNRWA’s reform initiatives, regular monitoring and reporting, and compliance with Canadian anti-terrorism requirements” and “Ensuring continued respect for UN humanitarian principles of humanity, **neutrality**, impartiality, and operational independence, and UN values”. [Emphasis added – M.H.]

As regards the implementation of UNRWA Reform Initiatives, the framework agreement provided that there be:

“Ongoing curriculum review process, which enables UNRWA’s educators to use consistent criteria in analyzing and enriching Host Government textbooks, in order to promote UN values and principles in UNRWA classrooms...;

Continued efforts to ensure **neutrality** of UNRWA operations in accordance with the Agency’s regulatory framework and policies governing the **neutrality** of UNRWA operations and related monitoring and reporting.” [Emphasis added – M.H.]

Noting the particular importance of ensuring UNRWA’s neutrality, the framework agreement included an entire section devoted to this subject, which provided as follows:

“Global Affairs Canada and UNRWA intend to work together, along with other donors, to continue to ensure that UNRWA implements its policies related to **neutrality**. **Neutrality** is a UN commitment and one of the four humanitarian principles formally adopted by the UN General Assembly and endorsed by UNRWA. It is understood to mean that irrespective of one’s personal beliefs and opinions, “humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.” It is a core obligation and value of UN staff, as well as part of UNRWA’s regulatory framework.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/priorities-priorites/where-ou/gac\\_un\\_unrwa-amc\\_nu\\_unrwa.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/where-ou/gac_un_unrwa-amc_nu_unrwa.aspx?lang=eng)

**Neutrality** is critically important to United Nations humanitarian agencies to gain and maintain the confidence of all and to operate independently, safely and effectively, especially in politically-charged or conflict situations. **Neutrality** is also a core obligation and value of UN staff and an important condition for donors' continued trust and financial and political support. **Neutrality** is integral to UNRWA operations and has been mainstreamed, as applicable, into UNRWA programming. **Neutrality** activities related to the conduct of staff and programming are integrated into UNRWA's core work.

Together with other donors, Canadian support will help UNRWA undertake efforts to:

- Ensure that UNRWA is able to address cases of inappropriate social media use in accordance with the Agency's regulatory framework;
- Strengthen the capacity of UNRWA staff to conduct investigations into credible allegations of misconduct by UNRWA personnel, including for alleged violations of UNRWA policies on neutrality, and consistent application of UNRWA policies regarding completion of such investigations;
- Levy clear and consistent administrative or disciplinary action, consistent with appropriate procedural safeguards, in response to those cases in which personnel have been found to be in violation of UNRWA's regulatory framework;
- Provide new and continued training of UNRWA personnel on the importance of UNRWA's **neutrality**, including through: induction courses for new employees, in-person training and workshops, continued implementation of UNRWA's e-ethics course, and e-training on UNRWA's policy on social media use by UNRWA personnel;
- Continue to work to review and enrich host country curricula to ensure it supports the learning of the Palestine refugee students and is in line with UN values and principles, including those that relate to **neutrality**. UNRWA pursues appropriate solutions where potential issues are found or raised.

Approximately CDN\$500,000 of Canadian funding will be allocated towards supporting: 1) mainstreamed neutrality activities and 2) new neutrality initiatives, thus helping UNRWA to implement its policies.

- Mainstreamed **neutrality** activities: Canada will contribute to activities that support **neutrality** in UNRWA installations; review and enrich host country curricula; **neutrality**-related investigations; and compliance with UNRWA's regulatory framework. These activities, taken together, will benefit all of UNRWA's more than 30,000 national staff located in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank.
- New initiatives: Canada will contribute towards social media training for staff being implemented in 2017. The training will focus on UN **neutrality** principles and will reach 3,000 senior area staff and staff with supervisory responsibility for at least one other staff member across UNRWA's area of operations.

In addition to these efforts, Global Affairs Canada expects UNRWA to respond, as appropriate, to address credible allegations of **neutrality** violations, if they arise.

The attached Annex outlines key activities related to Global Affairs Canada's expectations regarding UNRWA's **neutrality**."

[Emphasis added – M.H.]

UNRWA's duty to ensure neutrality was not invented for the framework agreement, but rather was already reflected in [UNRWA's 2016-2021 Medium Term Strategy](#)<sup>2</sup>, also referred to in the framework agreement, in the section entitled "Strengthening Management Systems for Maximum Impact and Effective Response" as a standing UN requirement. The relevant passage provided as follow:

"UNRWA will ensure that it operates in full compliance with its regulatory framework; applicable international law; and the humanitarian principles of humanity, **neutrality**, impartiality and independence. UNRWA will conduct regular inspections of facilities and ensure inspection and investigation systems are in place to ensure adherence to this commitment..."<sup>3</sup>

As regards monitoring and reporting UNRWA's adherence to its duties in general, and its duty to maintain neutrality, in particular, section 5 of the framework agreement places

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/mts\\_2016\\_2021.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/mts_2016_2021.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Para. 234, page 57

complete faith and reliance on UNRWA's own mechanisms and on the organization's Annual Operational Report (AOR).

On the basis of the new framework agreement, since 2016, [Canada has committed an unprecedented \\$110 million in support for UNRWA](#)<sup>4</sup>.

Interestingly, despite the considerable financial support Canada has given to UNRWA since renewing its funding, when the UN recently considered the extension of UNRWA's mandate, Canada abstained.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2018/10/canada-provides-support-to-palestinian-refugees.html>



## **UNRWA admits that the PA 2017 schoolbooks breach its duty of neutrality**

In March 2017, Palestinian media reported on a rift between UNRWA and the PA that focused on the problematic nature of the PA schoolbooks. Evidence of the rift first appeared on March 21, 2017, when *Amad*, an independent Palestinian news website, reported<sup>5</sup>:

"[PA] Minister of Education Sabri Saidam emphasized that he adheres to the Palestinian curriculum as formulated by the [PA] Ministry of Education, and that he will **not allow any change to the curriculum by UNRWA**. Saidam said this in a letter that he sent to one of the participants in a meeting convened by the Central Council of Parents in the Gaza Districts and [the Council of Parents] in the Maghazi Refugee Camp...

The meeting participants discussed UNRWA's attempt to change the curriculum for grades 1–4 in the UNRWA schools.

Chairman of the Council of Parents in Maghazi and member of the Central Council of Parents in the Gaza Districts Wasef Abu Mashayekh explained the dangers of UNRWA changing the curriculum. He emphasized that the goal behind this is to erase the Palestinian identity. He also noted that the goal of these changes is to erase all of the Palestinian national symbols and features and harm the philosophical, moral, and national foundations of the curriculum, and first and foremost to erase the map of Palestine (i.e., the PA map of Palestine that presents all of Israel as "Palestine" together with the PA areas) and its name, to establish the existence of the 'Israeli' occupation on the Palestinian land, and [to claim] it has a right."

[Emphasis Added – M.H.]

On March 26, 2017, *Donia Al-Watan*, an independent Palestinian news agency, expounded<sup>6</sup> on the rift and gave examples of the changes UNRWA had made in the textbooks:

**Headline:** "In documents: Accusations against UNRWA for targeting the national aspect of the textbooks"

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<sup>5</sup> See - [http://www.palwatch.org/pages/news\\_archive.aspx?doc\\_id=21452](http://www.palwatch.org/pages/news_archive.aspx?doc_id=21452)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.palwatch.org/site/modules/print/preview.aspx?fi=122&doc\\_id=21565](https://www.palwatch.org/site/modules/print/preview.aspx?fi=122&doc_id=21565)

“Ever since the characteristics became clear of the new [textbook] edition that UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) has distributed to its teachers, which includes changes in the new textbooks for grades 1-4, a great indignation has arisen among all sectors of the Palestinian society who have said that these are changes that harm the Palestinian identity and perpetuate the occupation’s existence...

This is not the first time that UNRWA is accused of inserting terms into the Palestinian textbooks for students of its schools, as this matter came up several years ago when it tried to insert the term ‘Holocaust’ into the seventh grade national study material...

The [PA] Ministry of Education and Higher Education re-emphasized its firm opposition to any change or correction in the Palestinian textbooks, after it was disseminated that UNRWA is attempting to do this. The ministry said in a statement, a copy of which reached [the independent Palestinian news agency] Donia Al-Watan, that according to international law UNRWA must use the textbooks of the host country. The ministry explained that it will take ‘punitive steps’ against anyone who attempts to change the textbooks or manipulate them.

The ministry explained that any attempt to change the textbooks constitutes an attack against Palestine and a targeting and erasing of the national identity. It emphasized that what was reported indicates a direct targeting of the national aspect of the textbooks, in a manner that is consistent with the occupation’s plan that warps and distorts these books.

The ministry called on the [UNRWA] agency to clarify its position, to immediately turn to the relevant officials in the ministry, and not to submit to the pressures of the occupation, because our textbooks are a symbol of our sovereignty and we will never allow them to be targeted and warped.

It should be noted that [PA] Minister of Education [and Fatah Central Committee Deputy Secretary] Sabri Saidam said last Wednesday [March 22, 2017] that ‘The ministry will not agree to a change or distortion of textbooks by any institution, whether it is UNRWA or other bodies.’...

Head of the parents' council at the UNRWA schools Zaher Al-Bana warned against the agency's plan [and said that] 'It erases the Palestinian identity through changes that it is attempting to insert into the textbooks.'

He said in a press statement: 'The goal of the plan is to erase and replace every expression of the Palestinian identity and heritage, the map (i.e., the PA map of "Palestine" that presents all of Israel as "Palestine" together with the PA areas), Jerusalem, the racist separation fence, and so on, and to replace them with other terms.'

He added: 'We as parents emphasized to UNRWA's department of education that we do not agree to this and that we oppose this plan and will act to thwart it. If the existence of a book including these materials in the schools becomes known to us, we will take it and destroy it.'

He noted that the goal of the changes is 'to brainwash the Palestinian students, to erase the culture of the [previous] generations and their connection to their homeland and cause, to establish the culture of normalization and living together in peace, and to distance the students from the Palestinian resistance.'

The edition and all of the study topics do not present the symbolism of Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, but rather only as the city of the three monotheistic religions, while weakening the Islamic presence within it and not addressing the Israeli checkpoints that prevent the Muslims from reaching the holy city [of Jerusalem] (sic., Muslims in the West Bank are allowed to pass through the checkpoints to Jerusalem).

Likewise, any text connected to the occupation's acts of oppression against the Palestinian people, like the racist separation fence, settlement, demolition of homes, daily executions, arrests, and the names of the Israeli detention centers, was erased and replaced.

In addition, the edition does not note Prisoner's Day or names of prisoners, does not connect the Jordan Valley region to Palestine, and omits the Palestinian heritage."

Examples of the changes that UNRWA made were depicted in a number of images of pages from the PA textbooks showing the original edition on the left side (yellow label) with "The

textbook before the change” written above it and the new edition with suggested UNRWA changes on the right (red label) with “The textbook after the change” written above it:



Image 1

Image 1 above shows a page from the original textbook on the left with the PA map of “Palestine” that presents all of Israel as “Palestine” together with the PA areas. The page on the right contains UNRWA’s suggestions for changing it.

The text at the bottom of Image 1 reads: “The change: Replacing the map of Palestine in the first grade Arabic language book with a picture of a bird and a pumpkin”

The page before the change includes the following text in English: “**Neutrality issue:** A historical map used in a non-historical context. The map is used to teach the sound (ttee) in the word (Falastteen (Palestine)).”

The page shows the PA map of “Palestine” and below it the word “Palestine” and the letters “ttee.”

The page on the right with suggested changes by UNRWA includes the following text in English: “Alternative Scenario Present another word that demonstrates the same sound syllable (ttee). For example: (Yaqtteen) (i.e., “pumpkin” in Arabic), (Yatteer) (i.e., “fly” in Arabic) or the word (Falastteen) without the map.”

The page shows an image of a pumpkin and under it the word “Pumpkin” and the letters “ttee,” an image of a flying bird and under it the word “Fly” and the letters “ttee,” and a blank space and under it the word “Palestine” and the letters “ttee.”



Image 2

Image 2 above shows the PA map of “Palestine” (on the left) being replaced by an image of hills (on the right).

The page before UNRWA’s suggested change includes the following text in English: **“Neutrality issue:** A poem illustrated by a historical map in a non-historical context.”

The page after the change includes the following text in English: “Alternative Scenario [Keep] the poem, but replace the illustration of a map with an image of the Palestinian hills.”



Image 3

Image 3 above shows another suggested change in the textbook.

Text at bottom of image: “The change: Cancelling what is connected to ‘Palestinian Prisoner’s Day’ from one of the national education lessons for third grade”



Image 4

Image 4 above shows another suggested change in the textbook to remove the PA map of “Palestine.”

Text at bottom of image: “The change: Removing the map of Palestine from one of the Arabic language lessons for fourth grade”

An additional response of the PA was reported, on Apr. 5, 2017, in the official PA daily, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*<sup>7</sup> as follows:

**Headline:** "Al-Agha: UNRWA is obligated to implement the host government’s curriculum in its schools"

"PLO Executive Committee member and Director of the Department for Refugee Affairs Zakaria Al-Agha said: 'UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) is obligated to implement the host government’s curriculum in its schools.' This was during his meeting with the UNRWA crisis team, comprised of the national and Islamic factions, the students' parents, and the popular committees, which was meant to discuss everything regarding the changes in the UNRWA textbooks in the PA areas.

The crisis team expressed its concern about the fact that the UNRWA administration distributed an edition that includes instructions and dictates for the teachers to change some of the teaching methods, which constitutes a blow to the culture of the Palestinian refugees’ right of return, and this concern reflects the viewpoint of the teachers, parents, and students alike.

<sup>7</sup> See - [https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=122&doc\\_id=21087](https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=122&doc_id=21087)

Al-Agha emphasized that the Department for Refugee Affairs is closely monitoring this matter, as it has held a number of discussions with Arab states that are hosting Palestinian refugees, with the UNRWA administration at all of its levels, and with Palestinian [PA] Minister of Education and Higher Education [Sabri Saidam].

He emphasized: 'There is an agreement that it is forbidden to make any change to the UNRWA curriculum, which is obligated to [follow] the curriculum set by the ministry of education in all of the Arab host countries. This has also been verified by the UNRWA administration - which said that no change will be made without consultation and prior coordination with the [PA] Ministry of Education and Higher Education and its counterparts in the Arab host countries - and also by the Arab host countries and Minister Sabri Saidam.'

The rift between UNRWA and the PA reached its pinnacle on Apr. 14, 2017, as reported in the official PA daily, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*<sup>8</sup>:

**Headline:** "The [PA] Ministry of Education has frozen its ties with UNRWA until further notice"

"The [PA] Ministry of Education and Higher Education yesterday [April 13, 2017] officially announced the **freezing of its ties with UNRWA** until its situation is settled. This is because the ministry is not convinced that the agency has taken back the changes that it made in the Palestinian textbooks.

The ministry emphasized that any distortion of the Palestinian textbooks constitutes a blatant violation of the host nation's laws, and that the **changing of any letter in them in order to satisfy any party constitutes a betrayal of the Palestinian narrative** and the right of the Palestinian people that is subject to occupation to maintain its identity and struggle, and to defend its way of struggle.

In his response to this position, [PA] Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr. Sabri Saidam emphasized that Palestine will surrender to no one and will not agree to trade in its honor through positions that constitute an insult to the Palestinian people, its history, and its struggles.

The ministry on Friday, March 24, 2017, warned the agency not to touch the

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<sup>8</sup> See - [https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=122&doc\\_id=20854](https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=122&doc_id=20854)

Palestinian textbooks, and demanded that it consult with the relevant parties in the ministry. However, nobody in the agency heeded this warning, and the ministry did not receive any official correspondence on the matter."

[Emphasis Added – M.H.]

The freeze in the ties lasted only three days, when the PA Ministry of Education reported on UNWRA's capitulation to the pressure of the PA.<sup>9</sup>

"Commissioner-General of UNRWA Pierre Krähenbühl emphasized that UNRWA is completely committed to the Palestinian curricula, and that no change will be made in these curricula.

This was said this afternoon [April 17, 2017] in his meeting with [PA] Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr. Sabri Saidam...

On this matter, Saidam again emphasized the close and historical connection between the Ministry [of Education] and UNRWA, and the efforts to strengthen the connection in a manner that will ensure the benefit of the education given to the refugees' children and the improvement of their results...

He also emphasized that the national curricula should be respected and any attempt that is liable to harm the curricula and their contents should be prevented.

Saidam emphasized that the ministry is interested in staying in contact with UNRWA at all levels in the education sector.

Krähenbühl explained that UNRWA is a central partner of the [PA] Ministry of Education, particularly in the field of teaching. He emphasized the right of the Palestinian children to receive a quality education and preserve the components of identity and culture. He also praised the active partnership between UNRWA and the ministry... and emphasized that any enrichment of the Palestinian textbooks will be done in coordination between the ministry and UNRWA."

The above reports clearly demonstrate how UNRWA has admitted to and understands that certain parts of the PA schoolbooks **breach the Agency's duty of neutrality**. The reports further demonstrate that, notwithstanding this breach, UNRWA has no intention to cease using these PA schoolbooks. Most importantly, the reports demonstrate how the PA's

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<sup>9</sup> See - [https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=122&doc\\_id=21108](https://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=122&doc_id=21108)



determination to indoctrinate the Palestinian youth is so strong that it is even willing to freeze its relations with the Agency at the expense of leaving hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children without any educational framework.

Later reports from the Palestinian media further demonstrate UNRWA's knowledge that the PA schoolbooks breach the Agency's duty of neutrality.

Having capitulated to the demands of the PA in April 2017, it would appear that UNRWA then attempted to circumvent the PA's obtuse approach by adding "enrichment" materials to the PA curricula.

This initiative was met with similar PA objections, as reported in the official PA daily, Al-Hayat Al-Jadida on Nov. 8, 2017<sup>10</sup>:

**Headline:** "The [PA] Ministry of Education reiterates its complete opposition to any step that harms the Palestinian curricula"

"The [PA] Ministry of Education and Higher Education reiterated its complete opposition to any step or attempt that UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) or any international body are liable to make against the Palestinian curricula – whether by omitting, changing, or adding any materials in contradiction of the philosophy of the [PA] curricula and in contradiction of the contents of the schoolbooks in everything connected to the national identity and cultural, social, and national heritage of our people.

The ministry stated in a notice yesterday [Nov. 7, 2017]: 'In light of the talk about the UNRWA administration's intention to add materials called "enrichment" material to our national curricula, the ministry explains that as part of the contacts made in the past with the UNRWA administration regarding the curricula, it was clearly and explicitly emphasized that it is necessary to be committed to the contents of the schoolbooks and their basic assumptions, and that all of the materials that UNRWA is interested in adding must be complementary and consistent with all of the contents of the schoolbooks.'

The ministry emphasized that all of the material that UNRWA is likely to add to the curricula must not harm the contents of those books, especially in light of the fact that according to international law, UNRWA is obligated to implement the curricula

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<sup>10</sup> See- [http://www.palwatch.org/pages/news\\_archive.aspx?doc\\_id=24274](http://www.palwatch.org/pages/news_archive.aspx?doc_id=24274)

of the host countries. In the same context, it noted that the only body that has the right to change or add new materials to the curricula is the Curricula Center, which is under the [PA] Ministry [of Education and Higher Education].”

A report on Nov. 9, 2017, in WAFA, the official PA news agency, added further details<sup>11</sup>:

**Headline:** “UNRWA’s enrichment materials: Changing the facts and tearing away the students from their reality”

“Around a week ago, UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) began to train several teachers working in its schools in the enrichment materials and activities that were added to the basic curriculum...

UNRWA began these trainings at the schools in the Gaza Strip. In the next stage they will also take place at the schools in the West Bank and diaspora – Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan; however, the materials that were added are arousing the anger of the teachers and the students’ parents, in whose opinion the concepts, pictures, and illustrations that they contain contradict the truth, distort history and the Palestinian identity, and contradict the thought and culture of the refugees in everything related to their right of return to their homeland, from which they were expelled.

Even though UNRWA Media Advisor Adnan Abu Hasna denied in a phone call that the materials that were added harm the Palestinian identity and history – because it is not within [UNRWA’s] authority to change and amend the [PA] Ministry of Education’s curricula, and because its schools are committed to conveying the curricula of the host states – the copies that we obtained of these materials prove the opposite. When we tried to talk with Abu Hasna about their contents, he refused to cooperate and answer any additional questions.

In one of the activities that were included in the Ministry of Education’s basic curriculum in the subject of National Education, ‘Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine’ was written under a picture of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque... But UNRWA replaced this with a picture under which is written ‘Color the wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.’

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<sup>11</sup> See - [http://www.palwatch.org/pages/news\\_archive.aspx?doc\\_id=24273](http://www.palwatch.org/pages/news_archive.aspx?doc_id=24273)

In the Science and Life 4th grade schoolbook, in one of the activities the students are asked to talk about malnutrition, and to use the suffering of the prisoners in the occupation's prison as an example of this. However, according to the outlook of the UNRWA curriculum, this is not appropriate for study, and the activity was replaced with another activity in which the students are asked to find two reasons for malnutrition and note its effect on the human body while using the internet.

A picture that was included in the Arabic Language subject for the same grade, shows two young women stricken with fear as a result of Israeli bombing. The students are asked to explain what is seen in the picture, but in the [UNRWA] enrichment material three additional pictures were added, which show that in the end the cause of the fear was a doll thrown on the ground.

Likewise, in the Science and Life subject for 8th grade in one of the examples for the rise in air pollution a picture is used of smoke rising as a result of the bombs that Israel dropped on a residential neighborhood in the Gaza Strip during the attack it carried out in 2014 (i.e., 2014 Gaza war). However, in the enrichment material the example was smoke rising as a result of trees being burned in a forest, in a clear attempt to distort the truth and tear away [the students] from the reality that they experience daily.

Supreme Parents Council Secretary Muwaffaq Kafarneh responded by saying that the teachers refused to complete the training that UNRWA began, but [UNRWA] threatened them with punishment and dismissal from their positions if they do not do this. He emphasized that this is not the first time that UNRWA is trying to convey its policy through the curricula, and said that '[the curricula] are as far as possible from the truth that the young generation must know'...

[PA] Ministry [of Education] Spokesman Sadeq Khaddour emphasized that UNRWA must implement what was determined in the laws and regulations, and be strict about conveying the curricula of the host states. He expressed surprise at UNRWA's attempt to bypass the Palestinian curricula by adding enrichment materials directed at the teachers...

He added: 'UNRWA must stop [teaching] these materials. This is not the first time that it is attempting to change and amend the curricula, and it has no authority to do this, but it is still insisting on doing this again and again. We reject this idea

entirely, and the topic will be dealt with before the UNRWA leadership in order to put an end to its actions.’

PLO Executive Committee member [and Secretary-General of the Palestinian Liberation Front] Wasel Abu Yusuf thinks that UNRWA needs to fulfill its central missions – providing aid to the refugees. He noted that the talk about changes and additions to the curricula are entirely unacceptable, and that this is interference in internal affairs. However, he did not hide that UNRWA is subject to pressures from the US and Israel, whose goal is to cancel its role and change the goal for which it was established... in order to erase the [Palestinian refugees’] right of return, which constitutes a real danger to the Palestinian cause.”

Even though it is unclear whether UNRWA once again capitulated to the PA demands, the bottom line remains the same – **UNRWA-run schools that use the PA curriculum are breaching the Agency’s duty of neutrality.**

**Additional examples of materials in the PA schoolbooks that breach UNRWA's duty of neutrality**

It should be stressed, that while the March-April and November 2017 media reports provided a brief insight into the problematic contents of the PA schoolbooks, they nonetheless understated the full extent of their malicious content.

The March 2017 media report referred to above pointed to only three PA maps, which expunged Israel's existence, contained in the PA schoolbooks. In reality, the schoolbooks for every age group, in a range of subjects, contain dozens of similar maps.

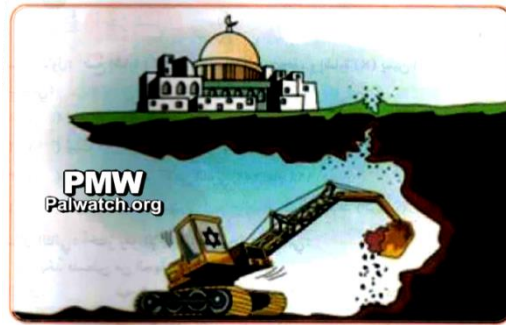
These maps are additional to multiple other instances in which Palestinian students are taught that the size of the Palestinian "state" is just over 27,000 sq. kilometers - a figure which does not limit the Palestinian "state" to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but rather includes all of the territory that is Israel. They are also additional to instances in which the students are taught that the Palestinian "state" borders with Lebanon in the north, the Red Sea in the south, and has a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea that stretches from Egypt to Lebanon; and additional to the dozens of instances in PA schoolbooks in which Israeli cities are referred to as being in Palestine.

The above media reports also did not point out other content that similarly breaches UNRWA's duty of neutrality. The following are just few examples of additional neutrality breaching content not mentioned in the reports:

- **PA 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies schoolbook<sup>12</sup>** which falsely depicts Israeli heavy machinery digging below and undermining the foundations of the Temple Mount

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<sup>12</sup> Page 64



تفكر وتأمل:  
الرسم الكاريكاتيري الأتي، ونكتب بقرة عن الرسالة التي أراد الرسام إيصالها.

- **PA 9th Grade Arabic Language textbook**<sup>13</sup> which discusses curfews imposed by the Israeli authorities. The discussion between the narrator and a Palestinian resident of a Ramallah neighborhood includes the following text:

“The curfew does not include us in the Al-Shurafa [neighborhood of Ramallah]. It is imposed on the Al-Natarish [neighborhood of El-Bireh]. **It looks like they are barbecuing one of the buses of the colony of Psagot, which is on the high mountain, with Molotov cocktails.**” [Emphasis added – M.H.]

- **PA 9th Grade Social Studies textbook**<sup>14</sup> which teaches the students:

“The right of the peoples to **self-determination and to resist occupation and foreign domination** [emphasis in source], **including turning to the use of armed force** [emphasis added – M.H.] – is a natural and legitimate matter, especially since international law in general forbids occupation. This is what is stated in the UN Charter in Article 4 of Section 2, which is dedicated to preventing the use of force, or the threat of using force, in international relations.”

The textbook continues<sup>15</sup>:

“Armed Palestinian resistance started with the beginning of the Zionist immigration to Palestine at the end of the 19th century, and it grew with the increase [of Zionist immigration]. Afterwards, it became a political

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<sup>13</sup> Pages 61 - 63

<sup>14</sup> Page 52

<sup>15</sup> Page 59 - 60

military operation and revolutions with the beginning of the British Mandate. Among the prominent Palestinian revolutions: The revolution of 1936 (i.e., 1936 Arab Revolt) and the great strike... The resistance operations became frequent after the [UN] partition resolution and the Zionist occupation of Palestine in 1948. The PLO has taken the armed resistance on itself since its establishment in 1965.”

- **PA 7th Grade Life Sciences schoolbook<sup>16</sup>** that teaches students about Newton’s second law by showing a picture of a masked Palestinian using a slingshot to propel a rock at Israeli forces.



- **PA 5th Grade Arabic Language schoolbook<sup>17</sup>** which teaches students that the Palestinian “heroes” who should be emulated include Dalal Mughrabi, a terrorist who led the murder of 37 Israelis, 12 of them children.

As previously noted, these examples are just a brief sample of the contents of the PA schoolbooks that UNRWA uses in its schools that are under PA control.

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<sup>16</sup> Page 77

<sup>17</sup> Pages 13 - 14

## **UNRWA's 2017 and 2018 Annual Operational Reports**

Examination of UNRWA's [2017](#)<sup>18</sup> and [2018](#)<sup>19</sup> Annual Operational Reports demonstrates how the faith of the Canadian government in UNRWA was misplaced and that UNRWA is flagrantly and consciously breaching its duty to maintain its neutrality.

In line with the fact that UNRWA's annual reports are themselves rife with examples of a one sided, anti-Israel biased approach, the reports say nothing about the fact that the PA's 2017 curriculum and textbooks breach the Agency's duty of neutrality.

In order to understand the destructive nature of UNRWA's use of the PA's 2017 schoolbooks, it is important to note that of the over 500,000 students studying in UNRWA schools, over 325,000 of them study in schools in areas controlled by the PA<sup>20</sup>.

While UNRWA's annual report does discuss the "neutrality" adherence measures undertaken by UNRWA, these references are merely technical in nature. When discussing the requirement that the educational materials used by UNRWA meet the necessary standards of neutrality, the 2017 annual report claims that, "the Agency has continued to improve its rigorous review of host country textbooks against the UNRWA Curriculum Framework"<sup>21</sup> while the 2018 report claims that "UNRWA continues to enhance its review processes and reporting mechanisms."<sup>22</sup> Both the 2017 and 2018 UNRWA reports state that, "Neutrality is one of the dimensions for the ongoing review of school textbooks. For

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<sup>18</sup>[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017\\_annual\\_operational\\_report\\_final\\_lr.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017_annual_operational_report_final_lr.pdf)

<sup>19</sup>[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2019\\_annual\\_operational\\_report\\_2018\\_-\\_final\\_july\\_20\\_2019.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2019_annual_operational_report_2018_-_final_july_20_2019.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Pages 14 of UNRWA's 2018 annual report.

<sup>21</sup> Page 34 of UNRWA's 2017 annual report.

<sup>22</sup> Page 38 of UNRWA's 2018 annual report.



detailed information in this regard, please see results reporting under Strategic Outcome Three of the AOR.”<sup>23</sup>

However, review of the sections referred to provides only technical information, such as the number of schoolbooks reviewed and in which areas,<sup>24</sup> but is devoid of any substantial insight regarding the findings of these reviews.

The glaring failure of UNRWA to clearly detail and publish the findings of its “*rigorous review of host country textbooks*” is no oversight. The Agency clearly realized that publication of these reviews would highlight the prejudicial and pernicious contents of the PA schoolbooks that it uses to educate hundreds of thousands of Palestinian students. Moreover, the Agency clearly realized that this publication would prove that it is breaching its duty of neutrality and would endanger the Agency’s international funding.

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<sup>23</sup> Page 49 of UNRWA’s 2017 annual report and page 52 of UNRWA’s 2018 annual report.

<sup>24</sup> Pages 36 and 37 of UNRWA’s 2017 annual report and pages 34 -39 of UNRWA’s 2018 report.

## **Other countries and organizations recognized the poisonous nature of the PA's 2017 curriculum and textbooks**

While UNRWA's reports remained void of any reference to the prejudicial and poisonous content of the PA's 2017 curriculum, a gathering tide of countries and even a UN body recognized the clear reality, following publication of a series of reports on PA schoolbooks by [Impact-se](#)<sup>25</sup>.

### **US**

A 2018 [State Department report](#)<sup>26</sup>, declassified in 2019, confirmed the reports in the Palestinian media stating that UNRWA had taken action to address the content of the PA schoolbooks that "it deemed as not aligned with UN values", but that the resulting actions were not implemented, ostensibly as a result of budgetary considerations.

[US legislation](#)<sup>27</sup> drafted following the State Department report states that "Textbooks used by the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the West Bank and Gaza demonize Israel, encourage war, and teach children that Palestinian statehood can be achieved through violence."

### **Norway**

In December 2019, the ruling coalition in the **Norwegian parliament** announced, that it is instructing the Norwegian government to "reduce or withhold financial support to the Palestinian Authority if they do not provide satisfactory improvements in school materials."

In [a statement](#)<sup>28</sup>, the Norwegian Parliament said:

"The coalition has been made aware of very reprehensible teaching material used in the Palestinian Autonomous Territories... Examples of content in the school books include references to violence, martyrdom, and terror. The coalition considers this to be devastating to the peace process and the development of democracy in the region, as well

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<sup>25</sup> See [https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-Curriculum\\_2017-Grades-5-11.pdf](https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-Curriculum_2017-Grades-5-11.pdf); [https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/The-New-PA-2018-Curriculum\\_Grades-1-12.pdf](https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/The-New-PA-2018-Curriculum_Grades-1-12.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/us-government-accountability-office-unrwa-textbook-report/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2343/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22H.R.+2343%22%5D%7D&r=1&s=7>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Publikasjoner/Innstillinger/Stortinget/2019-2020/inns-201920-007s/?m=1>

as being an expression of irresponsible pedagogy, and finds it unacceptable that Norwegian funds support a school system that promotes such destructive values.”

## **UK**

In March 2019, the UK’s Department for International Development [announced](#)<sup>29</sup> that “a group of international partners, including the UK will lead a review into the books included in the Palestinian Authority’s current curriculum for primary and secondary school children”. The announcement added that the review was necessary in order to “ identify the steps necessary to ensure [that the PA] books promote peace and tolerance”

## **European Union**

Having also been exposed to the contents of the PA’s 2017 curriculum and schoolbooks, in April 2019 the European Union adopted the UK initiative [stating](#)<sup>30</sup> that it will conduct a full academic study on Palestinian school text books.

## **UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

In an [August 2019 report](#)<sup>31</sup>, in an unprecedented move the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination stated that it is concerned “About the existence of hate speech in certain media outlets, especially those controlled by Hamas, social media, public officials’ statements and school curricula and textbooks, which fuels hatred and may incite violence”.

Accordingly the committee recommended that the PA “Combat hate speech and incitement to violence, including on the Internet and by public figures, politicians and media officials, and remove any derogatory comments and images from school curricula and textbooks that perpetuate prejudices and hatred.”

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-has-successfully-pushed-for-a-review-into-palestinian-textbooks>

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2019-000906-ASW\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2019-000906-ASW_EN.html)

<sup>31</sup> [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/PSE/CERD\\_C\\_PSE\\_CO\\_1-2\\_36938\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/PSE/CERD_C_PSE_CO_1-2_36938_E.pdf)

**Is UNRWA obliged by international law to teach the curriculum of the host country?**

While the PA strong arms UNRWA by claiming that the Agency is obliged under international law to teach the curriculum of the host country, it is important to note that such no legal requirement exists. True, to date, the **agreement**, as opposed to a requirement of international law, has been that UNRWA schools teach the curriculum of its host country. This agreement was reached in order to provide students who learn in UNRWA schools, for example in Jordan and Lebanon, with the opportunity to take the local matriculation exams. It is however untenable that teaching hatred of Israel or other materials that breach UNRWA's duty of neutrality is a requirement of the PA school system, and therefore UNRWA should not give in, as it has, to the dictates of the PA.

Furthermore, even if the PA is determined to teach its children to hate Israel and Israelis and enforce a reality in which Israel does not exist and murderers are glorified, UNRWA should not be party to these actions.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The government of Prime Minister Harper stopped UNRWA's funding amid fears that it was unable to ensure how its funds were being used. The new Canadian-UNRWA framework agreement paved the way for the renewed Canadian funding, but stipulated that the provision of the funds was conditional, inter alia, on UNRWA upholding its duty of neutrality.

While the PA is more than willing for UNRWA, which works solely on the basis of foreign government contributions, to provide an educational framework for over 325,000 Palestinian children who live in the areas it controls, the PA's actions, de facto, prevent UNRWA from meeting the elementary standard of neutrality.

The materials contained in the PA schoolbooks do not promote peace or Israeli-Palestinian co-existence.

UNRWA is aware of this and admits that the PA schoolbooks breach its duty of neutrality, but continuously capitulate to PA dictates and refrains from exposing the true nature of the PA schoolbooks.

The Canadian-UNRWA 2017 framework agreement stipulates that **maintaining UNRWA's neutrality is a fundamental requirement** to receive Canadian tax-payer aid.

The Canadian government relies on UNRWA to maintain its own neutrality and relies on UNRWA to report and rectify instances in which its neutrality was breached. UNRWA constantly breaches this trust both in its own actions and by hiding and mitigating the breaches forced upon the Agency by the PA.

The PA does not truly care about respecting UNRWA's neutrality and is even willing to see hundreds of thousands of Palestinian students lose their educational framework, if UNRWA dares to attempt to maintain its duty of neutrality and meet the terms of the Canadian-UNRWA framework agreement.

While the international community is recognizing the problematic nature of the PA schoolbooks, Canada, which relies on UNRWA to be its own sole watchdog, is effectively turning a blind eye to the open and clear breach of its own agreement.

To rectify these fundamental problems that continue to undermine peace and undermine Canada's goals, five steps could be taken by the Canadian government:

- Require that UNRWA explain why the agency concealed and failed to report the content of the PA schoolbooks and the ensuing breach of the framework agreement.
- Amend the 2017 framework agreement by adding Canada's periodical independent review of UNRWA's practices.
- Undertake an independent study of the PA schoolbooks used in UNRWA schools.
- Inform UNRWA that future Canada expects the agency to take all steps necessary in order to fully meet its obligations.
- Inform the PA that the use of its new textbooks in UNRWA schools forces the organization to breach its duty of neutrality and jeopardizes Canadian aid to the Agency.