



CENTER FOR MONITORING

THE IMPACT OF PEACE (R.A.)

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The Palestinian Curriculum and Textbooks

Clarification from the Ministry of Education – Palestine

Date: 12/5/2001

Introduction:

The Palestinian Ministry of Education (MOE) was set up in late 1994. It is a well-known fact that it has inherited a deplorable educational situation in the West Bank and Gaza from the Israeli occupation authorities. Since then, the Palestinian Ministry of Education exerted a significant effort tackling the deterioration befallen on the educational system during occupation. Serious problems like, triple shift schools, lack of teacher training, and the dire consequences of the recruitment practices... etc-characterized education in occupation time. However, the MOE, felt the need to develop a curriculum, relevant to the students needs to substitute the duality of curricula use in West Bank and Gaza and consequently to unify the education system. The plan includes contemporary topics in areas of democracy, human rights, and children rights, women empowerment, pluralism, tolerance. The new vision also includes new subjects: Health, Environment, Christian Education and Information Technology, in addition to improvement and changes on foreign language teaching...etc. Soon after its establishment, the MOE sought the assistance of UNESCO and donor countries in setting up the Palestinian Curriculum Development Center (PCDC). PCDC is now fully engaged in developing the first Palestinian curriculum ever in history. It has so far published Palestinian textbooks for two grades only: first grade (children aged 6 years) and sixth grade (children aged 11). For pedagogic reasons, it is planned and expected that the Palestinian textbooks for the remaining ten grades will be produced in stages by the year 2004/2005. Meanwhile, these grades are still using Jordanian textbooks in the West Bank and Egyptian textbooks in Gaza, which has been the case since 1950.

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Many in the international community underestimate the difficulty and the sensitivity of producing a national curriculum and textbooks for a people which is still suffering from a long brutal occupation and engaged in very complicated and frustrating negotiations which will decide its fate and its borders. Many underestimate the complexity of reconciliation and healing process and the time it requires. The MOE has so far operated under these circumstances. It is proud to be associated with a number of partners who wanted it to succeed in developing an efficient and effective system of education and in the making of a just and durable peace.

Why this clarification:

During the past three years, there has been a significant interest in the issue of the Palestinian textbooks, both locally and internationally. The international interest and questioning, though, were mainly focused on what Palestinian children study at school. There was no similar interest in what their Israeli counterparts study.

The textbooks used in Palestinian schools were under continuous scrutiny, mainly by an NGO entitled the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) a right wing, anti-peace Israeli center. CMIP started as a cyber institute (www.edume.com) three years ago. It now maintains offices in Israel and an address in the USA. During more than the first two years of its work, CMIP looked into textbooks used in Palestinian schools. Its reports on this subject were mainly used to argue against providing assistance to the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MOE) and UNRWA in the USA congress and European parliaments. So far, MOE has chosen to answer only questions or queries addressed to it directly and officially, and not to engage in media or lobby campaigns. We now feel that the internationally waged campaign regarding textbooks used in Palestinian schools has been one-sided and unfair. Therefore, it has decided to state its position regarding curriculum development in Palestine and to clarify some claims and misconceptions in various CMIP reports and publications.

Some important issues:

1. The Palestinian problem did not start with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. It started with the dispossession and eviction of the Palestinians from their homeland in historic Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This fact is alive in the individual and collective memories of the Palestinians. Curricula and textbooks will not be credible if they do not address this fact. We will not brainwash our children and miseducate them about the past. They will have to come to terms with the fact that the Palestinians are making historic concessions in order to achieve a just and durable peace in their country and in their region, in preparation for a better future for them.
2. The MOE is grateful for Jordan and Egypt for allowing us to use their textbooks until the Palestinian textbooks for the whole range of school grades are produced. The MOE reprints the Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks and uses them in Palestinian schools till replaced by Palestinian curricula which is phased-out over a 5-year period.

3. The MOE has avoided dealing with unresolved political issues in Palestinian textbooks. It has not mentioned Israel borders on maps. Israel itself has not defined its borders. The borders of the future independent Palestinian State are still not defined. These matters will be decided on by representatives of both countries and people through negotiations and agreements. Once these decisions are made, and are ratified by the international community through the UN, then they will be included in future Palestinian textbooks.
4. The MOE has chosen a participatory approach in developing the Palestinian curriculum and in writing the textbooks. It has invited qualified academics and educators from universities, colleges and schools to participate in the writing of textbooks through public advertisements. This participatory process required a lot of effort and time. The textbooks, which have been produced so far, reflect the general mood of the Palestinian at this stage.
5. The produced textbooks will be tested in schools and will undergo changes based on input from school teachers, the community at large and Palestinians academicians. The MOE welcomes comments on its published Palestinian textbooks from partners and professional bodies of all sorts. It will review this input and introduce the changes which will, hopefully, improve the textbooks.
6. We have referred to Israel in some of the Palestinian textbooks as the occupier this is what Israel is in fact on our land. This is what the United Nations calls Israeli presence on our land in its resolutions. We hope that Israel will end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza soon. Once it does, then we will stop using this name.
7. The Palestinian textbooks produced do not include any racist remarks against any people. This is a big step forward in the direction of reconciliation and peace, bearing in mind the fact that Israel is still occupying our land and subjecting our people to various forms of repression, harassment, collective punishment, killing, assassinations, destruction, denial of our human and national rights and confiscation of the future and dreams of our children.
8. East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel in June 1967. The Palestinians have the full right to mention Jerusalem in their textbooks as an occupied city. More, the late Israeli prime minister a greed in the last Camp David talks to return the city to the Palestinian people. They have the full right to consider Jerusalem as their future capital and to mention this position, hope and aspiration in their textbooks. Doing so is not incitement against any body.
9. Palestinians are Moslems and Christian so our Textbooks teach tolerance between them. This is part of civic education. Our textbooks focus on Palestinian society at this stage. The Israeli occupation authorities have denied us our right to teach about our country and our people all during the period 1967-m 1994. This teaching is part of our efforts to build a civil society and a modern democratic state. In the textbooks we have produced so far, we have not dealt with any other people, religion or country outside of Palestine. But, the intention of the Ministry is to avoid all forms of stereotyping on basis of race, gender, disability or religion. More, we expect it to encourage the development of positive images of people who are different from ourselves.
10. The inclusion of pictures or drawings of the Palestinian flag is not an act of incitement. It is, also, not in contradiction to any agreements or accords signed with Israel, as some CMIP reports state. Palestinian flags have been officially raised on all Palestinian institutions even on places where meetings with Israeli leaders and officials have taken place.
11. Like any other people on earth, we have the right to decide what our children study without pressure or coercion. As stated above, we welcome

comments on our Palestinian textbooks after they are published and distributed.

12. We are producing curricula and textbooks in the shortest period possible. It is in our national interest to do so. A Palestinian curriculum is a necessity for the creation of one national identity and unity. We have chosen the stages and the sequence of producing the Palestinian textbooks so that the process will not cause gaps in and harm to the education of our children. Meanwhile, we will go on using the Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks in grades which do not have Palestinian textbooks. It is not possible to shorten the period required for developing the Palestinian curriculum and textbooks. We will follow this logical sequence, which we have chosen as a result of a long discussion.

Final note:

The donors and the international community should help the Palestinians walk with pride in the difficult path of negotiations leading to independence and peace. The donors and the other UN member states should be courageous to voice their honest opinion about reality here in Palestine as they learn it first hand through the presence of their representative bodies. They should not be coerced into silence by unofficial lobbyists from any side. We expect them to use due process before they take positions and pass judgments. The first step in this process is to seek and find out the truth. This requires talking to all parties concerned and not accepting one-sided and biased reports. We are, and have always been, willing to answer questions and to clarify matters.

The Palestinians and Palestine have the right to have a place under the sun. The Palestinians have suffered enough because of the inactivity of the international community to enforce the UN resolutions in this land. The Palestinians should be supported to build an independent, sustainable, prospering, modern and democratic state. In the long process to do so they should be allowed the time to grow slowly and to develop their own views and convictions and act based on them. If surrounded and supported by sincere partners, the Palestinians will be able to overcome their frustration and will regain their hope in a better future for their children in the region.

The MOE has worked, and is still working, sincerely for the benefit of Palestinian children, for their better future and for a just and durable peace based on international legitimacy. It is grateful for all those who have supported its difficult work, commented sincerely on its shortcomings and celebrated its achievements and successes.



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C.M.I.P. reply to the Palestinian Authority

7th June 2001

Dr. Naim Abu Hommos
Deputy Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
POB 576
Ramallah

Dear Dr. Abu Hommos,

The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) welcomes the MOE decision to provide official clarifications concerning the content of Palestinian curriculum and textbooks. Less than 18 months ago, following a meeting with officials of the MOE, CMIP was disappointed with the MOE's decision not to respond to CMIP's first report on Palestinian textbooks. The current initiative is welcome as it could form a basis for genuine and thorough examination of the criticism regarding the respective curricula and textbooks and hopefully lead to changes that will increase the chances of peace.

1)

The MOE states that the "Palestinian problem did not start with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967", but with the "dispossession and eviction of the Palestinians from their homeland in historic Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948." It concludes that the textbooks will "not be credible if they do not address this fact", stressing: "We will not brainwash our children and miseducate them about the past".

The MOE's concern to provide credible textbooks should be applauded. But questions arise as to whether this concern is a genuine one, since it does not reconcile itself with the actual content of new Palestinian textbooks. For instance, Palestinian students are not told that part of the "Palestinian problem" stems from Arab and Palestinian rejection of the 1947 UN Palestine partition plan and their decision to resort to violence and war to

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prevent its implementation. These Arab and Palestinian decisions have played their part in the creation of the refugee problem, though this is not acknowledged or even hinted at in the textbooks. Another example of the potential for brainwashing is the salient indoctrination to Jihad and martyrdom against Israel to which the Palestinian children are subject.

2)

The MOE states that their children "will have to come to terms with the fact that the Palestinians are making historic concessions in order to achieve a just and durable peace ...".

This statement is indeed encouraging and all supporters of reconciliation and peace will, no doubt, approve and commend it. But again one must question whether it is genuine in light of the messages conveyed through the Palestinian textbooks. Palestinian children are not told about any historic concessions. The concept of a just and durable peace is not addressed at all. The Oslo Agreements are evoked only to stress "the entry into Palestine of Palestinian armed forces". Their content is not explained to the students, who don't know what the Agreements imply, namely mutual recognition between Palestinians and Israelis, the commitment to give up violence and to solve their conflict by negotiation.

3)

The MOE states that it "has avoided dealing with unresolved political issues in Palestinian textbooks. It has not mentioned Israel borders on maps. Israel itself has not defined its borders. The borders of the future independent Palestinian State are still not defined. These matters will be decided on by representatives of both countries and people through negotiations and agreements. Once these decisions are made, and are ratified by the international community through the UN, then they will be included in future Palestinian textbooks."

This clarification sounds logical, wise and even promising for the future. But it is not correct and does not reflect reality. The reality is that Israel has well defined international borders with Egypt, Jordan and even Lebanon, which have been formally recognized by the United Nations. Why is this reality being concealed from Palestinian children? Do they not deserved to be taught about it, especially in view of its implications for the negotiation over the borders of the future Palestinian State?

4)

The MOE states that it has referred "to Israel in some of the Palestinian textbooks as the occupier. This is what Israel is in fact on our land. This is what the United Nations calls Israeli presence on our land in its resolutions. We hope that Israel will end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza soon. Once it does, then we will stop using this name."

The suggested distinction between 1967 and 1948 appears reasonable. But this is not what is explained to Palestinian children in their textbooks. Palestinian children are taught that Israel conquered their homeland in 1948 and that Israel has been an occupier since its establishment in 1948.

5)

The MOE states that "East Jerusalem was occupied in June 1967. The Palestinians have the full right to mention Jerusalem in their textbooks as an occupied city. ...to consider Jerusalem as their future capital and to mention this position ... in their textbooks. Doing so is not incitement against any body".

Palestinian textbooks actually do not distinguish between East Jerusalem and the rest of Jerusalem. What is taught to Palestinian children is that both Palestine and Jerusalem, often denominated "the blessed soil", were stolen by the Jews and are occupied by Israel, without making any distinction between the period before 1967 and afterwards. Besides, Palestinian textbooks deny any religious, historical or political links, remnants or rights of the Jews with the Holy Land and with Jerusalem; even the connection to the Western Wall ("Wailing Wall") is denied them. One can consider that labeling the Jews as thieves, devoid of any right whatsoever to the Holy Land and Jerusalem, is indeed incitement against them.

6)

The MOE states that the "Palestinian textbooks produced do not include any racist remarks against any people. This is a big step forward in the direction of reconciliation and peace, bearing in mind the fact that Israel is still occupying our land and subjecting our people to various forms of repression ... "In the textbooks we have produced so far, we have not dealt with any other people, religion or country outside of Palestine."

The MOE claims that the PA textbooks "do not include any racist remarks against any people", and "do not deal with any other people, religion or country outside of Palestine". This is not correct. The new Palestinian textbooks refer explicitly to Jews and in very negative terms. This is done notably through a selection of quotes from the Koran. All these quotes are particularly negative and offensive. This has been done deliberately, since as is well known, the Koran also contains positive references to the Jews. This delegitimization is also effected through hints regarding the lack of honesty of Jews in keeping agreements and of their deceit. Finally, this is also done by recommending the pupils use a reference book "Our Country Palestine" by Mustapha Debagh, which is virulently anti Jewish. For instance the book includes the following sentence: "Perhaps Allah brought the Jews to our land so that their demise would be here, as it was in their wars with Rome".(Introduction to Vol. II, 1965 version.)

Other textbooks used in Palestinian schools contain even more blatant anti-Jewish stances. The argument advanced from time to time by PA officials that these textbooks are of Jordanian or Egyptian origin and that it is not in their power to strike out their anti-Jewish content is not convincing. In this respect, it is prudent to recall that since 1968 there has been an international mechanism monitoring manuals of Jordanian and Egyptian origin for use in the Palestinian schools operating in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. This mechanism, employed each year by the Director General of UNESCO, was abrogated at the explicit request of the PA by the General Assembly of UNESCO in October 1995. The PA could very well have maintained this mechanism until such time as it began producing its own school books. No one would have been able to

accuse it of using anti-Jewish textbooks. It deliberately chose a different path. Moreover, on at least two occasions between December 1998 and March 1999, the American government, within the framework of the Tripartite Commission against Incitement, offered the PA funding for the reprint of its school textbooks after their editing by the PA of their offensive references. The PA simply refused to even consider this possibility.

7)

The MOE states that "Palestinians are Moslems and Christian so our Textbooks teach tolerance between them. This is part of civic education. Our textbooks focus on Palestinian society at this stage. ... In the textbooks we have produced so far, we have not dealt with any other people, religion or country outside of Palestine. But, the intention of the Ministry is to avoid all forms of stereotyping on basis of race, gender, disability or religion. More, we expect it to encourage the development of positive images of people who are different from ourselves."

Though this explanation may sound logical and promising, closer examination exposes it as an attempt to evade a loaded and embarrassing issue.

Tolerance means accepting others as human beings, enjoying fundamental rights as human beings, whatever the differences between them and regardless of the resentment you may nurture against them. Therefore, it is not a matter reserved solely for citizens but also for foreigners who happen to live in a society or to visit it.

But even from the restricted perspective raised by the MOE, its explanation is puzzling to say the least in view of the fact that not only some "Shomronites" are living in their midst but that in addition there is a formal representation for Jews in the PA institutions, namely a Minister for Jewish Affairs, in the form of a Naturei Karta representative.

8)

The MOE states that "The inclusion of pictures or drawings of the Palestinian flag is not an act of incitement. It is, also, not in contradiction to any agreements or accords signed with Israel, as some CMIP reports state."

CMIP did not raise any argument regarding the Palestinian flag. It has only draw attention to the fact that on one drawing of the Palestinian flag, behind it, there is a map of Palestine incorporating all the territory of the State of Israel. This kind of teaching can indeed be viewed as incitement against an existing state recognized by the UN and with which the Palestinians concluded the Oslo accords.

9)

The MOE states that CMIP is "a right wing, anti-peace Israeli center".

This statement is not correct. CMIP is an independent American, non-partisan and non-ethnic NGO, which is not affiliated directly or indirectly to

any political party or faction. It carries out its activities from Israel, Switzerland and the United States. CMIP's sole concern is the establishment of a genuine and enduring peace between Israel and the Arabs, as well as the promotion of peace in other areas of conflict.

It is CMIP's deep conviction that the images portrayed of the other side to a conflict, conveyed by curricula, textbooks and teachers' guides, do have a notable impact on the conflict. They are able either to inflame it for another generation or to contribute to its cooling down and its ultimate resolution by resorting to negotiation and other non violent means.

10)

The MOE states that it "has chosen a participatory approach in developing the Palestinian curriculum and in writing the textbooks. It has invited qualified academics and educators from universities, colleges and schools to participate in the writing of textbooks through public advertisements" and that the textbooks produced so far, "reflect the general mood of the Palestinian at this stage".

This non-binding explanation cannot conceal the crucial fact that the initial status of the Palestinian Curriculum Development Center (PCDD) has been changed. From its inception, it enjoyed a relatively independent and exclusively professional status that was welcomed by the donors, which considered it as some guarantee for the fairness of its activity. Following the resignation of its first chairman, Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, in 1996, the PCDD was simply incorporated into the Ministry of Education. This development was perceived as worrisome by the donors. The concern of the donors was confirmed by the subsequent inability to ensure that the center would function in accordance with the aims, policies and activities of UNESCO, as explicitly formulated in the 1994 agreement between the PNA and UNESCO to establish such a center.

11)

The MOE states that "Like any other people on earth, we have the right to decide what our children study without pressure or coercion."

Like all other worthy principles, this one has limitations. Like any other people, the Palestinians have to abide by international charters and principles prohibiting incitement to hatred, violence and war, notably in education. Moreover, in this dawn of the 21st Century, must one continue to follow the false idea that national identity and patriotism can only be based upon hatred and rejection of another?

Yours sincerely

Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace