

## Executive Summary

*This report by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) surveys 103 Egyptian textbooks for use in primary, preparatory and secondary state schools and 16 textbooks for use in preparatory and secondary schools within the religious Azharite school system. The majority of the books were published in 2002 and the others – between the years 1999-2001. The books have been carefully scrutinized in accordance with specific criteria set by UNESCO and CMIP (see Introduction) focusing on the attitude of the Egyptian school textbooks toward the "other" and to the ideals of peace and tolerance. The manner in which the Middle Eastern conflict is dealt with in these books has also been investigated. Following are the main findings:*

### **A. The Attitude to the "Other"**

- *Judaism and Christianity are both respected as monotheistic religions and despised as unbelief. On the one hand, the Egyptian school textbooks stress the common human heritage of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and, on the other hand, they describe various aspects of Judaism and Christianity in negative terms. Islam is the only true religion and all other religions are viewed as false. Although the Torah and the Gospels are considered to be heavenly (i.e. revealed) books originally, it is claimed that they have been distorted by the Jews and the Christians, respectively. No adequate and objective information is given to the student about these two religions.*
- *Non-Sunite Muslim sects and non-Muslim sects that originated in Islam are referred to in one religious (Azharite) textbook in mostly negative terms. No other information is provided.*
- *The Christian West is not presented as a rival as such, but no adequate and objective information is given about its civilization either. On the other hand, past conflicts with the West, mainly in the context of the Crusades and modern Imperialism, are vividly described, using hostile language. Western Imperialism is presented as the source of almost all the calamities that have befallen the Arab world in modern times, beginning with occupation and economic exploitation, through the fragmentation of the Arab world and the creation of internal problems therein, and ending with the creation of the Palestinian problem and the support of Israel.*
- *The Egyptian textbooks – at least those of the state schools – endeavor to foster a positive attitude among the students towards the Christian minority, the Copts. Coptic civilization and monuments are presented as an integral part of Egypt's history, and the Copts' friendly relations with the early Muslims are emphasized, as well as their participation in the Egyptian national struggle. The Copts are*

*depicted as an integral part of the Egyptian nation. In the Azharite textbooks this trend is emphasized far less, but no negative references to the Copts appear in them. One should note, however, that the problems, difficulties and even clashes that have occurred in the past between the Copts and segments of Egyptian society are not mentioned or addressed.*

- *The image of the Jews, on the other hand, as portrayed in the Egyptian school textbooks of both systems, both historically and at present, is very negative. No Jewish individual is portrayed in positive terms, except for Biblical figures and Albert Einstein. The presentation of Jewish history is in considerable part lacking and often distorted. For example, the struggle of the Jews in ancient times against Roman occupation is presented as trouble-making. The harshest expressions against the Jews appear in the context of the relations between Prophet Muhammad and the Jews of Arabia. Negative attributes are sometimes attached to the Jews within the text, with the recurring theme that such traits characterize the Jews to this very day. Malice, greed, treachery, exploitation of others, fomenting of dissension, deception, racism, arrogance, hypocrisy, trickery, and hostility – are all presented as characteristics of the Jews. In the context of the Middle East conflict the Jews are referred to as a treacherous people and as enemies of the Egyptian people – in one case, even after the conclusion of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.*
- *On the other hand there is explicit recognition in the Egyptian books of at least one Jewish holy place in Jerusalem – the Western Wall.*
- *Zionism, the national movement of the Jewish people, is referred to on a few occasions, always in negative ways. It is described as an expansionist movement with terrorist inclinations, aspiring to take control of the whole area between the Nile and the Euphrates.*
- *No adequate and objective information about Israel, its society, etc., is found in the Egyptian school textbooks. Israel's image is negative: It is portrayed as a usurper who has taken possession of a country that belongs to others, driven them out of it and destroyed their homes. Israel inflicts pain and suffering and enjoys the resources of the land, while its rightful sons are regarded as strangers there. Israel is presented as an aggressor that attacked Egypt in 1956, collaborating with French and British Imperialism, and "lured" the Arab states into war in 1967. Although it has implemented the relevant clauses of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, its sincerity regarding a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is doubted.*
- *In spite of the peace treaty, Israel is not treated in the Egyptian textbooks as a sovereign state. Its name does not appear on the maps – except for two maps in a history book that refer to the "Jewish State". On many maps the name "Palestine" appears instead.*

*Geographic descriptions of the country refer to Palestine, even when it is Israeli territory within the pre-1967 borders that is being discussed.*

### **B. The Middle East Conflict**

- *The Middle East conflict is not presented objectively as a political struggle between two national movements, but rather as the usurpation of Palestinian land by foreigners with the help of Western Imperialism. The Egyptian textbooks fail to mention that it was the Arabs of Mandatory Palestine who started the war against the Jews immediately following, and in defiance and rejection of, the UN Partition Resolution of November 1947. However, they openly state that the Arab armies entered Palestine, following the termination of the British Mandate in May 1948, to expel the Jews from the land and eliminate their newly established state. The blame for the results of that war, mainly the loss of additional territory and the emergence of the Palestinian refugee problem, is put on the Jews alone.*
- *The solution of the conflict depends on the attainment by the Palestinians of their rights. The books reiterate the official Egyptian position regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including Jerusalem, and the return of the Palestinian refugees to their former homes. Egypt is described as a principal factor in fostering a peaceful solution along these lines. However, there are other expressions, although very few, that imply that the liberation of Palestine does not end here and that the option of war is not out of the question.*
- *All Arabs and Muslims should support the Palestinians in their struggle. The Egyptian books describe in detail Egypt's wars against Israel and its support of Palestinian armed raids inside Israel against Israeli civilians after 1967.*
- *Within the context of the Palestinian problem, Jerusalem, and especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque, receives special attention. Jerusalem is presented as the symbol of Arabism and Islam because of its religious importance and Arab roots. Its ancient Jebusite and Canaanite inhabitants are identified as Arabs. The ancient Jews are described as foreigners who tried to seize it, but were defeated by the Babylonians and the Romans, until the city was liberated by the Muslim Arabs. Jerusalem is holy to the three monotheistic religions but the Jews do not have any right to it. The facts that they constitute the majority of the population there, and that Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel, are not mentioned. Jerusalem is exclusively Arab and should be returned to the Arabs, if not peacefully, then through a Jihad.*

### **C. Peace and Tolerance**

- *A major effort is made in the Egyptian school textbook to foster tolerance and fight religious extremism. Emphasis is placed on the promotion of good relations between Muslims and Christian Copts inside Egypt and on the inhibiting of extremist trend among Muslims there. In this respect, the books talk of the importance of freedom of thought in religion and against the influence of extremist religious leaders on “half-ignorant youths,” which has brought about the emergence of fanaticism and terrorism inside Egypt. The textbooks highlight, in this context, the generally tolerant nature of Islam toward non-Muslims, as well as aspects of Islamic history and law that indicate such tolerance. The Azharite (religious stream) books, on the other hand, also contain non-tolerant aspects of Islamic law regarding non-Muslims.*
- *Peace in general is exalted in the Egyptian school textbooks, both as a human and as an Islamic value. It is declared to be Egypt’s goal. But when examined more deeply, it turns out to be a conditional value, both on the political and religious levels. On the political level peace is made conditional upon reciprocity on the part of the enemy, which is interpreted as acceptance of the Arabs’ demands. On the religious level, peace is conditional upon the interests of the Muslims at any given moment. If the Muslims are stronger than the enemy, peace may be legally rejected. The meaning of peace in itself – as presented to the Egyptian students – does not exclude war, and this reaches the point, in several cases, of advocating war in the name of peace.*
- *The peace process between Egypt and Israel is discussed in the Egyptian school textbooks - beginning with President Anwar Sadat’s visit to Israel in 1977, through the Camp David Accords of 1978, and ending with the peace treaty of 1979 - the main articles of which are presented. But the textbooks do not endorse the spirit of the treaty, in particular Article 5 of Annex III, which stipulates that “the Parties will cooperate in promoting peace, stability and development in their region”. Furthermore, Israel’s sincerity regarding peace in the Middle East is doubted, especially so when peace – as has been already mentioned – is seen as conditional upon Israel’s compliance with the Arabs’ demands in order to continue having peace. Moreover, there are a few expressions in the Egyptian school textbooks that still advocate war against Israel, without naming it specifically.*
- *The Egyptian school textbooks present an ambivalent approach toward war. On the one hand, war is portrayed as a negative phenomenon. On the other hand, it has a bright side. Besides this ambivalence, there is much praise for the Egyptian army and its fighters – especially in language exercises. Stories of past wars are*

*brought in which the Egyptian or Muslim side is much praised and the enemies degraded. The enemy's defeat is a recurring theme in language exercises as well. The Azharite books contribute to this issue an array of Islamic war rules which do not always conform to what are now the accepted rules of war, especially so far as the treatment of prisoners-of-war and the occupied population are concerned.*

- *Egypt's wars with Israel are discussed much more extensively than the peace process with it. The October (Yom Kippur) War of 1973 in particular is depicted as a major victory that brought about the liberation of the Sinai Peninsula – a clear distortion of reality, as most of Sinai was returned to Egypt as a result of negotiated agreements throughout the 1970s, including the peace treaty of 1979.*
- *The ideal of jihad has several interpretations in the Islamic tradition, of which some could be used in the service of peace. However, it is interpreted in the Egyptian school textbooks almost exclusively as a military endeavor. In religious terms, it is war against God's enemies, i.e., the infidels. In secular terms, it is war against the homeland's enemies and a means to strengthening the Muslim states in the world. In both cases, jihad is encouraged, and those who refrain from taking part in it are denounced. In the context of the Middle East conflict, the ongoing violence in the Holy Land is termed jihad. Also, Jerusalem is destined to be liberated by jihad.*
- *Martyrdom, side by side with jihad, is an exalted value in the Egyptian school textbooks. The books define the martyr, talk of his elevated position in God's eyes and of his reward in Heaven, provide the students with examples of heroic martyrdom, both in Islamic and modern history, and feature expressions of readiness for martyrdom.*
- *The Egyptian school textbooks reject terrorism in principle. They strive to arouse among the students feelings of disgust toward it and promote cooperation between the individual citizen and the security authorities against this phenomenon. Strict Islamic laws against banditry are also invoked in this context, in order to give the anti-terrorist campaign inside Egypt religious legitimacy against the local terrorists who are mainly extremist Muslims. But the books fail to apply these strict standards to other cases of terrorism outside Egypt, such as, for example, Palestinian terrorism against Israelis, which is described as resistance against occupation and as jihad.*

*There are several positive elements in Egyptian textbooks, such as the positive attitude towards the Copts and the stress on tolerance and against religious extremism. However, the overall attitude of the school textbooks to other issues is either ambivalent or negative in the sense that they do not conform to most of the criteria recommended by UNESCO and CMIP and*

*furthermore are marked by a biased, stereotyped and hostile stance toward the "other".*

*Egypt is a leading country in the Middle East. It is in a unique position to set an example for all other Arab countries in the direction of peace and stability in the region. Education has a most important role in the establishment of the spirit of peace amongst the younger generation, and this is a crucial condition for peace to take hold. In order to achieve this jihad should be interpreted not only in military terms and serve as a conduit of war against the other; peace should not be portrayed as conditional; non-Islamic religions should be presented as independent faiths in their own right, not as extensions or precursors of Islam. Such necessary improvements could be made on the basis of the few expressions that already exist in the books, like, for instance, the two maps in which Israeli territory is referred to by the title "The Jewish State."*