

Jews, Zionism and Israel in Syrian Textbooks

Introduction

Syria is a major party to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It confronts Israel both directly and through Lebanon, with certain influence on the Palestinian arena as well. Its deep-rooted nationalist ideology, its traditional aspirations for all-Arab leadership and its late President's staunch beliefs regarding the conflict, have all made Syria the last main bulwark against Israel on the latter's borders.

Yet Syria joined the peace process in 1991 (the Madrid Conference) and, though still in a state of war with Israel, declared peace a strategic choice. A relevant question in this context, therefore, is whether Syria has internalized the concept of peace with Israel and to what extent, if any, this is reflected in Syrian public life, notably in education.

In Syria, all schools, including those of the private sector and UNRWA are under the close supervision of the Ministry of Education which imposes on them all one curriculum and a single list of textbooks.

The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) has undertaken to investigate this issue through a survey of Syrian textbooks - as it has done regarding Palestinian and Israeli ones. To that end sixty-eight textbooks for grades 1 to 12 were examined, all of which were part of the Syrian curriculum for the year 2000. They include:

- 26 Reading and Literature books for grades 1-12
- 8 Grammar books for grades 5-12
- 7 Geography books for grades 5-11
- 7 History books for grades 5-11
- 3 Civics books for grades 4-6
- 6 National-Socialist Education books for grades 7-12
- 8 Islamic Education books for Muslim students in grades 3-6 and 8-11
- 3 Christian Education books for Christian students in grades 4, 6 and 7

All these books were thoroughly scrutinized and all material relevant to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the peace process and other related subjects extracted and then organized according to specific themes. Each theme is represented by one or more quotes from the textbooks, each translated into English and accompanied by reference to its specific source. The scope of extraneous explanations has been reduced to a minimum, so that the source material speaks for itself.

Original Quranic or Hadithic negative references to the Jews have not been included in the survey, though present-day anti-Jewish expressions based on such references have.