



02/22/2008

American Jewish Committee Studies New Palestinian Textbooks

By Arlene Kushner , For The Bulletin

The American Jewish Committee, in cooperation with the Institute for Monitoring the Impact of Peace and Tolerance in School Education, will soon release a report on the most recently published Palestinian Authority (PA) textbooks. The findings, based on a detailed analysis of the textbooks, has particular relevance in light of ongoing negotiations between Israel and the PA.

In an interview, Arnon Groiss, director of research for the institute, has provided an advance view of the material that will be offered in the report, as well as an overview of the Institute's findings regarding all of the textbooks previously reviewed.

In the textbooks reviewed, Palestinians are represented as the only rightful possessors of Palestine. They are seen as descendants of the Canaanites, who are said to be Arabs who immigrated to Palestine in 3,500 B.C. A 2004 text describes the Canaanites as having made the most significant contributions to mankind.

Jews are seen as invaders in antiquity and colonialists now. There are gaps in history so that in most texts there is no mention of a Jewish commonwealth or any suggestion of Jewish legitimacy (or even presence) in the land.

Jerusalem is represented as exclusively Arab, from the Jebusites. Jews are seen as occupiers in the city.

In older books used in the PA schools (from 1996), Jewish holy sites were referred to as such: the Kotel (Western Wall), the Machpelah (Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron), Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem. By 2000, the Jewish connection to these places had been erased. Rachel's Tomb, for example, is called the Mosque of Bilal Bin Rabbah.

Zionism is not seen as legitimate. Jewish immigration is referred to as "infiltration." Jewish presence in the land is not recognized, and Jewish residents are not counted among the inhabitants of the land. (When population statistics are given, Jews are simply excluded from the numbers.)

There is no mention of Jewish cities, such as Tel Aviv. The one exception is an 11th-grade text that includes Tel Aviv but in very small letters. Israel is not identified as such.

Israel is not recognized as a sovereign state, either in text or on maps. For example, a 2001 text lists the countries of the Levant as Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. In maps (e.g., a 2002 atlas), the whole is Palestine. In some maps, Israel within the Green Line may be delineated, but it is marked as the area occupied in 1948.

In one grade 11 text, there are two Israeli maps utilized that do label Israel. These are for Allon's plan and Sharon's plan for division of the land, and the purpose is to demonstrate "Israeli colonialist schemes."

There is an attempt to even avoid referring to "Israeli" territory. Instead such terms are substituted as "land of the 1948 war," or the "interior."

The exception is in grade 11 texts, in which pre-1967 Israel is referred to in some instances.

Cities within the Green Line, such as Haifa and Jaffa, are referred to as Palestinian.

Palestine is referred to as a country that already exists, its declaration of independence having taken place in 1988.

There is no objective information provided on the history and culture of Jews or Israelis. The exception is a reference to the Jewish Bible in an 11th-grade text.

Jews in Israel are represented as evil and without a single positive trait. Jews commit treaty violations, use tricks, kill people and are seeking to expel and exterminate Palestinians.

From a grade 8 text: "Your enemies kill your children, split open women's bellies, etc."

From a 12th-grade text, there is a poem in which Jews are compared to snakes. Zionism is defined as a racist, Western imperialism.

A grade 10 text produced in 2004 represented the Protocols of the Elders of Zion as true. After the Belgian government, which had provided support for these texts, protested, a reprint of the book was done in 2007 that left this out. There is no evidence, however, that the version of the book that alluded to the Protocols was removed from all schools.

Jews are represented as solely responsible for the current situation, while Palestinians are their victims. The single exception is in an 11th-grade text that acknowledges that the Arabs attacked Israel in 1948.

The focus in the texts is on violence. There is no open support for peace based on reconciliation. Where "peace" is mentioned, it is in the abstract.

"Liberation" of all of the land of Palestine is encouraged and praised. "Return" is seen as a violent process, part of the liberation.

The emphasis on the violence of the struggle is intensified because of focus on the traditional Islamic ideals of jihad and martyrdom. Martyrdom is sometimes described as a "wedding party."

From a grade 7 text: "Hearing weapons clash is pleasant to my ears. And the flow of blood gladdens my soul."

The texts declare themselves as being against terror but say that Israel improperly defines the legitimate struggle as "terrorism." One grade 8 book provides a favorable description of terrorism.

However, there is an abundance of implicit support for terrorism via the use of terms such as "martyrs," praise for those in prison and those in Palestinian armed groups (called Fidai). Terror is never explicitly denounced.

©The Evening Bulletin 2008