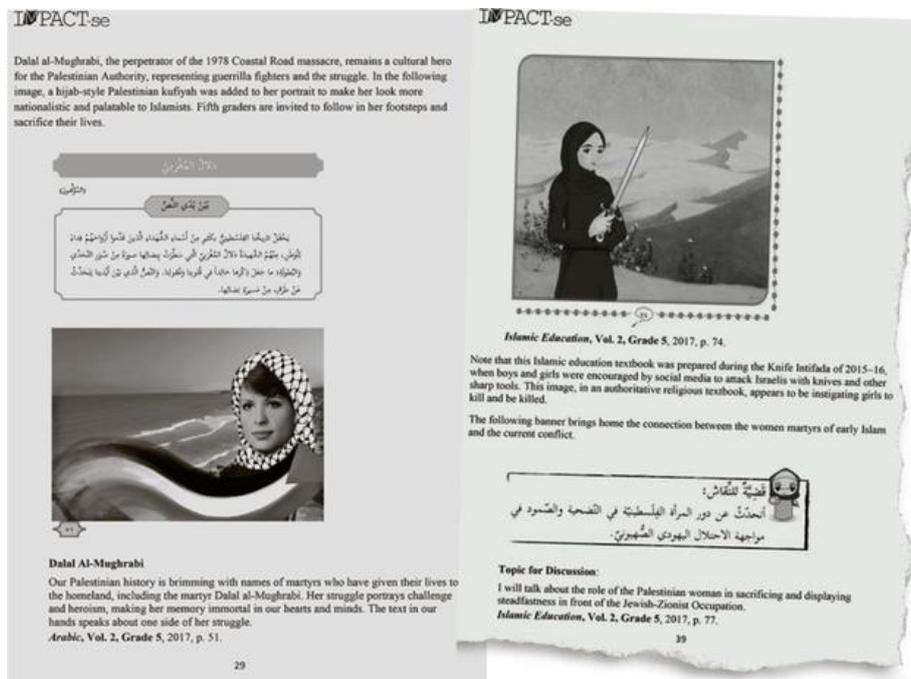




UN Schoolbooks Glorify Terrorists

Report criticizes teaching materials at Palestinian schools supported by Switzerland



Excerpts from a textbook [featuring] Dalal Mughrabi (left); in 1978, she was the leader of a Palestinian terror squad.

By Simon Widmer; January 5, 2019

The (female) terrorist who murdered 38 Israelis: A hero. The assassination carried out by the terror organization of Black September in the course of the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972: A success. Young women preparing for armed battle: Legitimate.

This is the way the Palestinian Authority's new teaching materials explain it—they have been in use since 2016 at schools in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, as shown by a report recently published by the Israeli NGO IMPACT-Se, which scientifically examines textbooks and curricula. The NGO also documented a number of other examples of anti-Semitism, and of the glorification of terror and martyrdom.

UN schools adhere to official teaching materials

Through contributions to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees, Switzerland also supports schools in which these extremely problematic contents appear. The teaching materials are used at UNRWA schools, as confirmed by spokesperson, Sami Mshasha. Schools of the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees adhere to the official curriculum so that the children will later be able to switch to secondary schools or universities, he says.

Switzerland is one of the most important funders of UNRWA. In the last year alone, the Federation paid almost 27 million Francs to the aid organization which is led by Pierre Krähenbühl from Geneva. UNRWA uses more than half of the budget in the area of education and operates 711 of its own schools in the Middle East.

According to Mshasha, his organization does not have a mandate to work to effect change in official teaching materials. Yet they use additional teaching materials, in order to “ensure that the curriculum corresponds to UN values and principles.”

Mshasha points to a study that was carried out by the Universities of Tel Aviv and Bethlehem to assess teaching materials that were used in a less negative manner. However, this study was conducted in 2013 and examined older teaching materials. In addition, the authors already demanded at that time that committees rework school materials both in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

“Not conforming” to Switzerland’s position on the Middle East

“School materials that run contrary to the spirit of a two-state solution, which glorify violence, which fuel racism and anti-Semitism or trivialize violations of international law and human rights are not in compliance with the Swiss position on the Middle East,” said a spokeswoman of the [Swiss] Foreign Office (EDA). “Switzerland will examine reports such as those by IMPACT-se and discuss them with other donor nations.”

The administration is currently working on a UNRWA report which is based on a statement from Valais National Council member, Philippe Nantermod. The report, which is to be published in 2019, will also address the “organization’s efforts to ensure quality in the area of textbooks,” as stated by the EDA.

The head of IMPACT-se, Marcus Sheff, says that Switzerland “allows schoolchildren to become radicalized.” He said he “welcomes having the [Swiss] Federal Council screen UNWRA in a report.” This report would “have to be published as quickly as possible” and “especially should examine the question of whether the teaching materials conform to UNESCO standards.” According to Sheff, there are similar investigations also being conducted in the EU, Great Britain and Finland.

Already last year UNWRA was at the center of a political dispute. The new foreign minister, Ignazio Cassis, criticized the aid organization publicly, which constituted a break politically at that point. Under Cassis’ predecessors (Didier Burkhalter and Micheline Calmy-Rey), Switzerland had always stood firmly behind the UN’s aid organization for Palestinians.

Following Cassis’ statements, the federal president at the time, Alain Berset, summoned him for a talk. Subsequently, the speaker of the National Council, André Simonazzi, announced that nothing would change with regard to Switzerland’s Middle Eastern politics, nor with regard to the financial support that UNWRA receives.