Executive Summary

- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in the wake of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 in order to carry out relief and works programs for the Palestinian war refugees. It is still operative.
- UNRWA also provides educational services. In the school year of 2012/13 it ran a total of 703 schools with 491,641 pupils in the Middle East. 245 of these schools were in the Gaza Strip and 99 in the West Bank caring for 225,098 and 51,695 pupils, respectively.¹
- Pupils at UNRWA schools study the same curriculum and use the same books authorized by the host governments – the Palestinian Authority in the case of the West Bank and Gaza.
- Examination of the PA textbooks used in UNRWA schools reveals three main fundamental lines as far as the attitude to the rival "other" within the conflict is concerned: denial of legitimacy to the "other", demonization of the "other", and advocacy of a violent liberation struggle against the "other" – without any territorial limits – instead of peaceful co-existence with it.
- These lines contradict UNRWA's commitment – as a UN agency – to a peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict, as well as its obligation – again, as a UN agency – to treat all member states equally without denying the legitimacy of any of them or demonizing them (Israel in this case).
- Consequently, UNRWA should stop using such belligerent materials in its schools and replace them with other ones that promote peace and co-existence with the adversary.
- It is recommended that any further financial support of this Agency's educational activity by official bodies in the UK be conditioned upon the former's compliance with this demand. This is the purpose of this report.

UNRWA's Educational Activity in the Middle East

1. UNRWA – the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestinian refugees in the Middle East – was established in the wake of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 by the UN General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of December 8, 1948, in order to carry out relief and works programs for the Palestinian war refugees. The agency began operations on May 1, 1950. In the absence of a solution to the refugee problem, the Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate.

2. Over half of UNRWA's general budget is dedicated to education (381,055 million USD out of a total budget of 673,789 million USD in 2012, which makes 56.55%).² The agency also offers health, relief and social services. UNRWA provides free-of-charge basic education to children of Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian Authority-controlled West Bank, the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, the Israel-controlled East Jerusalem, and in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. In the school year of 2011/2012 it ran a total of 703 schools caring for 491,641 students. 245 of these

¹ www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2013042435340.pdf
schools were in the Gaza Strip and 99 were in the West Bank, with 225,098 and 51,695 students respectively.\textsuperscript{3} Two of UNRWA's West Bank schools are actually located in the greater Jerusalem area which was annexed to Israel in 1967.

3. Basic education means both elementary and intermediate (also called "preparatory") schools, that is, grades 1-9 or 10, depending on the specific school system in each country. Only in Lebanon does the Agency operate some nine high schools as well, since Palestinian students of these grades find it difficult to study in local public or private schools.

4. UNRWA maintains close cooperation with government educational authorities in its various areas of operation. Students at UNRWA schools study the same curriculum and use the same books authorized by the host governments (except for East Jerusalem where the PA curriculum and books have been adopted for use instead of the Israeli ones). Beside the schoolbooks issued by the respective national authorities with no involvement on UNRWA's part, the Agency has published several textbooks of its own which teach issues such as tolerance and human rights in its schools, as it testifies: "One of our key programmes promotes human rights and non-violent communication skills, conflict resolution and tolerance."\textsuperscript{4} However, these additional books do not usually touch sensitive issues related to the conflict such as the attitude to the "other" or the possibility of solving the conflict peacefully.

5. The use of books provided by the host governments in UNRWA's school is problematic because these books sometimes contain material that contradicts UNRWA's professed mission. Being a UN agency, UNRWA is committed to the ideal of peace and is bound by the UN's goal of solving the Middle Eastern conflict peacefully. In line with this commitment, UNRWA should also refrain from propagating hate indoctrination towards any group, including ethnic and religious ones. Moreover, as a UN body, UNRWA is obliged to treat all member states equally, and never promote against any of them attitudes of non-recognition, prejudice and stereotyped portrayal, not to mention demonization. However, the books studied in UNRWA's schools often advocate an armed struggle against Israel which is denied legitimacy as a sovereign state and severely demonized. This is the case as well with the Palestinian curriculum.

Fundamentals of PA Education regarding the Jewish/Israeli "Other"

6. Examination of some 150 textbooks of various subjects issued by the Palestinian Authority and taught in grades 1-10 at UNRWA's schools in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has revealed three main fundamental lines as far as the attitude to the rival "other" within the conflict is concerned:

7. First: denial of legitimacy

According to the PA schoolbooks, there are no Jewish rights whatsoever in Palestine – only "greedy ambitions" [\textit{Atmaja}].\textsuperscript{5} There are no Jewish holy places there either – the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem are all presented as Muslim holy places usurped by Jews.\textsuperscript{6} Jewish

\textsuperscript{3} \url{www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2013042435340.pdf}
\textsuperscript{4} \url{http://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/knowledge-and-skills}
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{National Education}, Grade 7 (2011) p. 20
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{National Education}, Grade 7 (2011) p. 21 regarding the Wailing Wall, \textit{ibid.}, p. 55 regarding the Cave
cities – including Tel Aviv – are not shown on the map, except for one or two cases. Israel's 5.5 million Jews are not counted among the country's legitimate inhabitants while Israeli Arabs and Diaspora Palestinians are, which may present in a nutshell the essence of the perceived "Right of Return" – to be discussed later on: the 5.5 million Jewish illegitimate inhabitants of Palestine would leave and the 4.5 million Palestinians of the Diaspora will return and settle in their place:

8. "Let us examine the figures – the inhabitants of Palestine on 1.2.1999
1) The [West] Bank 1,972,000
2) [The] Gaza [Strip] 1,113,000 36%
3) The Palestinians of the "Interior" [i.e, pre-67 Israel] 1,094,000 13%
4) The Palestinians of the Diaspora 4,419,000 51%
Total 8,598,000 100%"
(National Education, Grade 6 (2007) p. 10)

9. Israel is not a legitimate state according to the PA schoolbooks studied at UNRWA schools. The name "Israel" does not appear on the map, except for two cases. In far more cases the name "Palestine" appears instead and covers Israel's pre-1967 territories as well:

10. "Map No. 3: The Arab States"
"Palestine"
(Geography of the Arab Homeland, Grade 9 (2011) p. 8)

11. Palestine replaces Israel in textual material as well:
"The land of the Levant [Al-Sham in Arabic] presently comprises the following states:
  1. Palestine
  2. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
  3. The Republic of Lebanon
  4. The Syrian Arab Republic"
(History of the Ancient Civilizations, Grade 5 (2004) p. 30)
Note: Later editions feature "Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria" only, with no titles. The State of Israel is missing in both cases.

12. The term "Israeli territory" is usually replaced by circumlocutions such as "the Interior" (see the first quotation above) or "the Lands of 1948".

13. Regions and cities within Israel proper are presented as exclusively Palestinian:
"Haifa and Gaza are two Palestinian [port cities]."
(Our Beautiful Language, Grade 5, Part 2 (2011) p. 90)
Note: Haifa is the main port city of pre-1967 Israel

14. "Activity: Let us color the Negev desert on the map of Palestine."
Note: The Negev region is part of pre-1967 Israel.

15. Second: demonization

of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb.

8 National Education, Grade 4 (2011) p. 43
Israel is not presented as an ordinary sovereign state, but rather as an occupying entity existing at the expense of the Palestinian people's right to self determination in its own homeland. In addition, Israel is a source of many evils directed against the Palestinians and other Arabs. During my ten-year research of PA schoolbooks I have gathered over thirty accusations against Israel in various fields, beginning with its very establishment, through its attributed usurpation, aggression, oppression, destructive conduct, desecration of holy places, etc. and ending with its perceived responsibility for drug abuse phenomena and in-family violence in Palestinian society. To make things worse, no objective information about either Israel or the Jews, that would balance their negative image in the books, is given to the students. Below is a case of an extremely demonizing text:

16. "Your enemies killed your children, split open your women's bellies, took your revered elderly people by the beard and led them to the death pits."
(Reading and texts, Grade 8, Part 2 (2010) p. 16)

17. Third: advocacy of violent liberation struggle rather than peace with the adversary
A delegitimized and demonized adversary is not a real partner for peace. Accordingly, no peaceful solution to the conflict is advocated in the PA books used in UNRWA's schools. Instead, a violent struggle of liberation against its occupation (both before and after 1967) is promoted. This struggle, which is never said to be restricted to the areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip alone, is made more compelling by the use of the traditional Islamic concepts of Jihad and martyrdom [Shahadah] within its framework. Examples:

18. "Good morning, O my homeland… A morning of glory and red liberty, watered by the martyrs' blood… [Assignment:] I will reconcile the following poetic lines with the feelings they express: 'A morning of glory and red liberty, watered by the martyrs' blood…' – The hope for the liberation of Palestine."
(Reading and Texts, Grade 9, Part 1 (2012) pp. 9-10, 12)

19. "Palestine
O brother, the oppressors have exceeded all bounds and Jihad and sacrifice are necessary…"
(Reading and Texts, Grade 8, Part 1 (2012) p. 44)

20. "The Martyr
… Hearing [weapons'] clash is pleasant to my ear And the flow of blood gladdens my soul As well as a body thrown upon the ground Skirmished over by the desert predators … By your life! This is the death of men And whoever asks for a noble death – here it is!"
(Our Beautiful Language, Grade 7, Part 1 (2011) p. 75)
21. The above-presented examples clearly show that UNRWA's educational role among the Palestinians is problematic as far as peace education is concerned. One specific issue in this general context that deserves special attention is the so-called "Right of Return".

The "Right of Return" Issue
22. The essence of the Middle East conflict is the century-long struggle between Jews and Palestinian Arabs over one piece of land stretching between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan, which both parties regard as their historical homeland. The United Nations Organization's attempt in 1947 to solve the conflict by way of partition was rejected by the Arab side which started a war against the Jews in December that year. The war between the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs, to whom five Arab armies joined in May 1948, lasted sixteen months and ended in an Arab defeat. Both Jews and Palestinians lost in the war one percent of their respective populations. One of the results of that war was a mass exodus of Palestinians from areas taken over by the Jews, which later became part of the nascent State of Israel. During subsequent years, a parallel number of Jews came to Israel from the neighboring Arab countries, having mostly fled due to their deteriorating safety conditions there.

23. The Palestinian and Arab narrative of the Middle East conflict emphasizes what is termed "the Right of Return" which is interpreted as the personal right of every Palestinian, who left his or her home in Palestine in 1948 or afterwards, to return to it and to reclaim his or her property in full. This perceived right also applies to the refugee's descendants with no limit of number, time or place of birth.9 Thus, the total number of such claimers has grown during the period that has passed since 1948 from few hundred thousands to several millions. Although said to have been legally based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on Resolution No. 194 adopted by the UN General Assembly on Dec. 11, 1948,10 it is clear that such a claimed right has no legal precedence in history and, indeed, has not been applied in other cases of wartime refugees throughout the twentieth century, which witnessed a record number of such refugees.

24. Apart from its unique character in international terms, the "Right of Return" also raises serious political and human problems, since its full application would mean the destruction of the State of Israel as a Jewish state and thus deny the Jewish nation its right to self determination which has been legally recognized by virtue of the UN partition resolution. Indeed, throughout the years that succeeded the establishment of Israel, the "Right of Return" issue was often mentioned in Arab forums within the wider context of the discussion of Israel's liquidation. In Israeli eyes, therefore, the continued persistence on the "Right of Return" by any Arab party betrays that party's desire to wipe Israel off the map. Any impartial observer must admit that such fears are solidly grounded in light of the vast human mass involved.

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9 See "Palestinian Right of Return" in Wikipedia, http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AD%D9%82_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A (Arabic)
10 Ibid.
25. If peace in the region is meant to be concluded between the Jewish State and its Arab neighbors – and it is so meant internationally – then the "Right of Return" issue should not stand in the way to peace as it does today. That is especially important in school, in particular – schools that are run by an international body such as UNRWA, which is bound by UN resolutions regarding peace in the region and is expressly committed to the ideal of peace.¹¹

**Teaching "The Right of Return" I: The Ideological Foundations**

26. The "Right of Return" is based ideologically on the argument that Palestine belongs to the Palestinian Arabs alone and that it became the focus of Jewish Zionist greedy ambitions (atma’) in the nineteenth century with a view to expelling or exterminating the indigenous population. Those ambitions were supported by British imperialism in the twentieth century and culminated at the UN Partition Resolution of 1947. Then war broke out in which the Arab side was defeated and Zionist terrorist organizations expelled a whole nation from its homeland and established the State of Israel.

27. **Quotations**

"The Zionist colonialist greedy ambitions in Palestine started in 1882… The coming of the Jewish throngs to Palestine continued until 1948 and their goal was taking over the Palestinian lands and then taking the original inhabitants' place after their expulsion or extermination… The Zionist greedy ambitions increased with the support of British Imperialism, as the British foreign minister Lord Balfour issued his declaration on November 2, 1917 which called for giving the Jews a national home in Palestine…"

*(National Education, Grade 7 (2011) p. 20)*

28. "In the year 1947 the United Nations Organization adopted a resolution partitioning Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews. Accordingly, the British Mandate over Palestine ended and the Mandate government withdrew. Then war erupted between the Arabs and the Jews in 1948, which brought about the capture of part of Palestine by the Jews and the occurrence of the Catastrophe [Nakbah] which caused most of the Palestinians to emigrate."

*(Reading and Texts, Grade 8, Part 1 (2012) p. 45)*

29. Under such circumstances it would be only natural – this line of argumentation continues – that those refugees, as well as their descendants, will be entitled to return to their usurped homeland by all means any time. In fact, the textbooks used in UNRWA's schools never discuss any other possible solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.

30. "The number of the Palestinians in the world is close to nine millions… Four and a half millions live in the Diaspora outside of Palestine… Most of them are refugees who wait to return to the motherland after having been expelled from it…"

*(National Education, Grade 4, Part 1 (2011) p. 43)*

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¹¹ See the slogan "Peace Starts Here" in English, Arabic and Hebrew on UNRWA's Web site [http://www.peacestartshere.org/index_h.php](http://www.peacestartshere.org/index_h.php)
31. "The [refugee] camp is not considered an original home for the Palestinian refugee. Rather, it is a temporary place where he has been forced to live. All the Palestinians wait for the return of every Palestinian to his city or village from which he was made to emigrate."
(Islamic Education, Grade 6, Part 1 (2012) p. 69)

Teaching "The Right of Return" II: Practice

32. The "Right of Return" is part and parcel of the discussion of the conflict. It appears in stories, such as the one in which a grandfather is showing his grandson the ownership deeds of the land they owned in the Coastal Plain and "the keys to our house which we were forced to leave by the [Israeli 1948] occupation", and the grandson promises to keep it.12 Besides, there are language exercises using this theme such as the following one:

33. "Activity 2: Let us feel in the empty space with the appropriate noun…
The [refugee] dreams of returning to his homeland."
(Our Beautiful Language, Grade 5, Part 1 (2011) p. 91)

34. Especially interesting in this context is the use of poems in order to strengthen among the students the sense that the return is inevitable. The poems add an emotional dimension to the issue and reveal one of its characteristics that is not usually evident in other forms of discussion of the "Right of Return".

The Violent Character of "The Right of Return"

35. The "Right of Return", by definition, is a right, not a privilege. As such, it does not depend on Israel's good will and is not part of the peace process. Rather, it is presented as a decisive event, shrouded in an atmosphere of violence. The following two poems well exemplify that:

36. "We Shall Return [Excerpts]

…
Tomorrow we shall come back and the ages shall listen
To the footfalls during the return
We shall return with the resounding storms
With the sacred lightening and the star
With the winged hopes and the songs
With the soaring vulture and the eagle
Yes! The thousands victims shall return
Victims of oppression shall open every door"
(Our Beautiful Language, Grade 7, Part 1 (2011) p. 28)

37. "We Are Returning [Excerpts]
Returning, returning, we are returning
Borders shall not exist, nor citadels and fortresses
Cry out, O those who have left:
We are returning
Returning to the homes, to the valleys, to the mountains
Under the flag of glory, Jihad and struggle

12 History of the Ancient Civilizations, Grade 5 (2012) p. 7
With blood, sacrifice, fraternity and loyalty
We are returning
Returning, O hills; returning, O heights
Returning to childhood; returning to youth
To *Jihad* in the hills, [to] harvest in the land"

**Conclusion**

38. The manifestations of the "Right of Return" in the PA textbooks taught in UNRWA schools are not nostalgic literary pieces. Rather, as presented to the students and shown here, the "Right of Return" plays a prominent role in the Palestinian political vision of a continued struggle against a delegitimized and demonized Israel until its eventual destruction. The educational services provided by UNRWA to Palestinian students in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the neighboring countries thus help to propagate this non-peaceful line, in absolute contradiction to the Agency's declared mission. The huge accumulated number of UNRWA's indoctrinated graduates throughout six decades of operation is the Agency's contribution to the perpetuation of the conflict. It is true that UNRWA has always maintained a policy of non-involvement in local curricula taught in its schools. But it is now high time that this policy be changed. An international organization of this caliber committed to the ideal of peace and relying in its funding on democratic countries mostly, should have a say in this matter, especially in view of its relatively large share in Palestinian educational activity. UNRWA should not continue its policy of absolute submission to the political, ideological and propagandist lines of the host governments in its areas of operation whenever these lines contradict UNRWA's principles and mission. There are things that UNRWA must not teach. It is therefore mandatory that action be taken by all parties concerned, especially those ones that contribute to the Agency's budget, to make it change this course of action.