

Petitions Committee

Sent via email: petitions@parliament.govt.nz

05 June 2023

Tēnā koutou Honourable Members of the Petitions Committee¹,

RE: written submission on petition CRM:0115042**Part I: Introduction**

1. Thank you for the invitation to enter this written submission on my petition requesting *that the House of Representatives does not appropriate funds that could go towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)*.
2. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in 1949 to deal exclusively² with approximately 750,000 Arabs displaced as a result of Israel's 1948 War of Independence. Today, there are over 5.5m people served by UNRWA. New Zealand has been a longstanding supporter of UNRWA, providing approximately NZ\$1m each year, and publicly praising the organisation.

Part II: A brief history of the main issue - teaching children to hate Jews and glorify terror

3. A clear pattern has emerged over several decades that textbooks used by UNRWA contain egregious antisemitism and incitement to terror; staff employed by UNRWA incite violence on social media; and UNRWA creates its own racist material for use in its schools³.
4. In 2019, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) raised concerns "about the existence of hate speech in

¹ The Committee is chaired by Hon. Jacqui Dean, with Sarah Pallett serving as the deputy chair. Members include Nicole McKee, Jamie Strange, Teanau Tuiono, and Hon. Poto Williams.

² In contrast to UNHCR, that looks after all refugees in the world, UNRWA uses a different definition of "refugee" (including people with citizenship) and actively opposes resettlement.

³ See, for example, the IMPACT-SE reports presented in [2001](#), [2002](#), [2003](#), [2004](#), [2005](#), [2007](#), [2008](#), [2009](#), [March 2011](#), [May 2011](#), [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2022](#) that show continued inclusion of egregious antisemitism in the curriculum used by UNRWA; and the UN Watch reports of [September 2015](#), [November 2015](#), [2017](#), [2019](#), [2021](#), and [2022](#) in which more than 100 examples of UNRWA staff and teachers inciting violence on social media.

[Palestinian Authority]... school curricula and textbooks [used by UNRWA], which fuels hatred and may incite violence..."

5. In 2021, a report funded by the European Union and conducted by the Georg Eckert Institute (GEI)⁴ was published. Despite evidence of bias against Israel and fundamental flaws in an early draft⁵, the report highlighted examples of egregious antisemitism, glorification of terror, rejection of peace, delegitimization of Israel, and incitement to violence. For example, an entire section of the school texts deals with "the depiction of Dalal Al-Mughrabi". Dalal led an attack that murdered 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children. The United Nations has described her a terrorist⁶. The textbooks used by UNRWA call her act one of "defiance and heroism, which made her memory immortal in our hearts and minds."
 - a. Furthermore, the GEI report found:
 - i. Jews are described as deceptive, inferior, cowardly, and/or aggressive and parts of the curriculum are said to send the message "that the Jews as a collective are dangerous and deceptive, and demonises them. It generates a feeling of hatred toward Jews and must be characterised as antisemitic".
 - ii. Jews are deindividualized and historic Jewish connection to Israel is omitted.
 - iii. Peace agreements and negotiations post-Oslo Accords that were previously included in the curriculum have been removed. The GEI report notes passages in the curriculum about non-violence and reconciliation were consciously omitted from Oslo letters.
 - iv. Violence against civilians is considered central to the narrative of "Palestinian nation-building" and textbooks refer to violence against Israelis as acts of "heroic struggle."
 - v. Violent jihad and martyrdom are taught and glorified in multiple subjects and frequently used in praise of violence by Palestinians against Israeli civilians.
 - vi. Israel is not referred to by name, the textbooks erase Israel from maps and assert Palestinian ownership over Jewish-founded cities. There is almost no portrayal of individual Israelis and when they are presented, they are referred to solely in pejorative terms.
 - b. The GEI director, Eckhardt Fuchs, testified before the EU Parliament in September 2021 confirming that the Palestinian Authority curriculum, as a whole, does not meet UNESCO standards, as antisemitism and violence were identified in some books⁷.

⁴ A full version of this report is available at https://bit.ly/GEI_report_UNRWA

⁵ See, for example, https://bit.ly/GEI_flaws and https://bit.ly/GEI_draft_deeply_flawed

⁶ See https://bit.ly/UN_Dalal_terrorist

⁷ See https://bit.ly/GEI_testimony.

- c. The EU Commission assessment of the findings of the GEI report said
*"It is very clear that the [GEI] study does reveal the existence of very deeply problematic content which remains of serious concern...changes to the curriculum are essential...full compliance of all educational material with UNESCO standards of peace, tolerance, coexistence and non-violence must be ensured as must any reference of antisemitic nature need to be addressed and taken out."*⁸
 - d. Deb Collins, DM PHM at the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), met with UNRWA officials in December 2021⁹ and mentioned the GEI report. She said the inclusion of antisemitism and glorification of terror in the UNRWA curriculum was "not surprising" and accepted UNRWA's promises that they had systems to adequately manage the material.
6. In 2020/1 UNRWA's own staff were found to have produced material for their schools that included the promotion of violence and terrorism¹⁰. UNRWA leaders admitted staff had created and distributed content that violates UN values to over 320,000 of its school students and claimed that they had addressed the problem by November 2020¹¹.
- a. However, in February 2021, UNRWA-created materials produced after November 2020 were circulating among students¹². These teaching aids included messages that endorse violence and Jihad, and condemn Arab-Israeli peace.
 - i. Despite this, MFAT Chief Executive Chris Seed, told the Foreign Affairs Trade and Defence Select Committee in March 2021 that¹³
"I haven't seen anything back from UNRWA that says they are being anything other than significantly serious in looking at this issue [of hate in textbooks] and how it came about".
7. In July 2022, there was still evidence that UNRWA was creating their own school materials with content that encourages jihad, violence, and martyrdom, as well as content promoting antisemitism, and the erasure, demonization, and delegitimization of Israel; and deliberately directing students to pages in Palestinian Authority textbooks containing hateful passages that violate UN values¹⁴.

⁸ See https://bit.ly/EU_Commission_GEI

⁹ MFAT File note GOVE-1151755117-10811. Notes in that document about the UN Watch report at that time (https://bit.ly/UNWatch_2021) were redacted on the basis that the information MFAT wrote about the report would be likely to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand.

¹⁰ For example, praising Palestinian militant figures such as Izz al-Din al-Qassam and Dalal Mughrabi, known for leading violent operations against Jewish civilians; both are presented as positive role models. See https://bit.ly/UNRWA-produced_material_hate

¹¹ See https://bit.ly/UNRWA_claims_issue_addressed

¹² See https://bit.ly/Followup_UNRWA_still_hateful

¹³ See https://bit.ly/2021_SelectCommittee_MFAT

¹⁴ See https://bit.ly/July2022_review_UNRWA_hate

-
8. A report published in March this year (2023) shows that UNRWA has continued to create their own egregious material, as well as continuing to use the hate-filled texts produced by the Palestinian Authority. The report contains 25 examples from 10 different UNRWA schools of heinous content, including 9th grade study material created by UNRWA that celebrates a Palestinian firebombing attack on a Jewish bus as a “barbecue party”. The report also contains newer examples of UNRWA teachers and other staff posting support for hate or violence, including conspiracy theories about Jews controlling the world, and praising Hitler.
- a. Of more than 120 UNRWA staff identified in the report, six were put on administrative leave¹⁵.
The response from the UNRWA Teachers Union in Lebanon was to lead their students on a 3-day strike after one of their colleagues was suspended for glorifying Palestinian terrorists’ murder of Jewish worshippers in a synagogue^{16,17}.
 Hamas - the group that controls the Gaza strip - and Palestinian Islamic Jihad also denounced UNRWA’s decision^{18,19}.
UNRWA reinstated the teacher after three weeks, with thanks from the UNRWA Teachers Union²⁰.
 - b. The majority of teachers and staff identified as inciting violence on social media faced no consequences²¹. As Hillel Neuer, CEO of UN Watch, said²²
“UNRWA is trying to pretend they solved the problem, even as they signal to their staff—and to terrorist organizations like Islamic Jihad which pressed UNRWA to reject the UN Watch report—that they don’t really object to the virulent antisemitism of their teachers, which UNRWA and its donors know pervades the agency,”
And the egregious material is still being used in UNRWA schools.
 - c. The report’s findings directly contradict statements and promises made recently²³ by UNRWA: that the agency uses maps acknowledging the existence of Israel; that it doesn’t teach about the glorification of terrorist Dalal Mughrabi; that its employed “neutrality officers” ensure the prevention of teaching of hate; and that its own reviews of host country textbooks identify all pages of problematic content, flag them, and provide specific instructions to teachers to avoid them²⁴.

¹⁵ See https://bit.ly/UNRWA_6staff_onleave

¹⁶ See https://bit.ly/staff_response_UNRWA_action

¹⁷ See https://bit.ly/Ultimatum_UNRWA_hate

¹⁸ See https://bit.ly/Hamas_response_UNRWA

¹⁹ See https://bit.ly/PIJ_UNRWA_statement

²⁰ See https://bit.ly/UNRWA_reinstated_teacher_glorify_terror

²¹ See https://bit.ly/weak_UNRWA_response2023

²² *ibid*

²³ And in 2019 to the US government: see https://bit.ly/GAO_report

²⁴ See https://bit.ly/UNRWA_denial, <https://bit.ly/43LCPOI>, and <https://bit.ly/42pnaTR>. MFAT staff continue to accept UNRWA assurances despite the evidence of how hollow they are.

Part III: What I am asking

9. I ask the House to stop all funding to UNRWA until the organisation can show they have taken effective steps to stop teaching children to hate Jews and glorify terror.
10. New Zealand contributes approximately NZ\$1m each year to UNRWA; sometimes more for special appeals. UNRWA's operating budget in 2022 was US\$1.6 billion²⁵. Stopping the provision of 0.06% of a budget is unlikely to make a practical impact on the operations of UNRWA. However, ceasing to fund an organisation that has such a clear history of racism would mean the actions of the New Zealand government will be better aligned with its rhetoric.
 - a. Successive governments have claimed to be against all forms of racism²⁶. In the Prime Minister's speech to the inaugural Counter Terrorism Hui in 2021, Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern said New Zealand's counter-terror strategy included "...reducing racism and hate speech...". Funding UNRWA's racism and hate makes a mockery of those claims and strategy.
 - b. New Zealand recently joined the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and ambassador Andrew Jenks said²⁷
"We hope that through our application we can underline New Zealand's commitment to combatting anti-Semitism [sic] and demonstrating solidarity with the global Jewish community, at a time when anti-Semitism [sic] is rising globally. It is for the international community to stand firm against every form of intolerance wherever it may be found...".
Funding an organisation that employs staff who praise Hitler and glorify the murder of Jews is at odds with that rhetoric.
 - c. The New Zealand government co-leads the Christchurch Call against extremism online²⁸. Funding an organisation that employs staff who incite violence online and who teach children to glorify extremist violence is at odds with that initiative.
11. The contract with UNRWA stipulates that the grant be administered in accordance with "the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and United Nations values"²⁹.
 - a. Surely, teaching children to glorify the murder of Jews is not in alignment with United Nations values or any of the other principles listed.

²⁵ See https://bit.ly/UNRWA_2022_budget. This is approximately US\$290 per person, as UNRWA caters for 5.5m people. Notably, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which looks after all refugee groups in the world, provides similar services to UNRWA for approximately US\$56 per person.

²⁶ For example, the 2019 National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly.

²⁷ Speech delivered at the IHRA Stockholm Plenary Session, 23 June 2022.

²⁸ For example, https://bit.ly/Chch_call

²⁹ Paragraph II of the Grant Arrangement between MFAT and UNRWA.

-
12. On several occasions, MFAT staff have given assurances to The Israel Institute of New Zealand that they do not send taxpayer funds to any other organisation that glorifies terror or employs people who incite online. There is no reason to doubt those assurances, so it is concerning that an exception seems to have been made for supporting incitement against Jews.
- a. It is unlikely that the House, MFAT officials, or Minister Mahuta would tolerate funding UNRWA if the violence glorified in its classrooms was directed at, for example, Māori or Muslim communities, rather than Jews. Yet the funding and political support for UNRWA continues³⁰. The House should ensure that no more New Zealand taxpayer funding supports antisemitism, just as there is no support for any other hate.

Part IV: Excuses from MFAT officials for continuing funding, and responses

13. MFAT officials have claimed that other countries also fund UNRWA, suggesting that the practice is acceptable³¹.
- a. Other countries have condemned the hate and introduced legislation to stop funding³².
 - b. That MFAT officials apparently conspire with some other donors to continue funding UNRWA hardly makes a strong case for any reasonableness in the face of overwhelming evidence of severe and persistent abuses of minimum standards (as discussed in Part II, with references).
 - c. Even if other countries had *increased* their support for UNRWA, that does not excuse the funding of extremism by our government. Likewise, if all other countries decided to cut their funding but MFAT had tangible evidence that issues were being adequately addressed then it would seem reasonable to continue funding the organisation.
 - d. MFAT officials have set themselves reasonable standards regarding the provision of aid, which include "applying the values that reflect who we are as a nation." Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary PDG at MFAT, has said³³ that "New Zealand has received assurances from UNRWA that it is committed to operating in line with [United Nations] values".
 - i. Those assurances were given in July 2021. The evidence (see Part II, and references) clearly shows those assurances to be hollow. Continuing to fund hate and incitement, when

³⁰ For example, [a Tweet from Minister Mahuta on 16 Sept 2022](#) read "🇳🇿 will provide **\$3 million over 3 years** to the @UNRWA which provides essential services and protection to #Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank. **Aotearoa New Zealand is pleased to be a longstanding supporter** of the Agency's work. 🇳🇿" [emphasis added]

³¹ For example, <https://bit.ly/43mY9JA>

³² In addition to the United Nations, mentioned above, the European Union has called for conditional aid to UNRWA (<https://bit.ly/3OzmmIL>), the United States has legislation to do similar (<https://bit.ly/3q4k8qy>), and the UK has condemned the hate and cut funding as a result (<https://bit.ly/43dhsoY>).

³³ In a letter dated 05 July 2021 to the Israel Institute of New Zealand.

assurances are consistently proven to be ineffectual, reflects poorly on New Zealand's values and standards.

ii. Glorifying terror is surely not aligned with UN values.

e. We are told that New Zealand has an "independent foreign policy" and our nation led the world in universal suffrage, for example. Either New Zealand stands against [anti-Jewish] extremism or the House decides to continue funding it.

14. MFAT officials have told the Israel Institute of New Zealand that UNRWA has robust internal mechanisms to ensure educational materials adhere to UN values and UNRWA stated principles of "neutrality, impartiality, and independence"³⁴.

a. However, UNRWA refuses to disclose any of these documents to donor nation parliamentarians or the general public. It is unclear what evidence MFAT officials use to base their assessments of effectiveness. The publicly available evidence (see Part II, and references) suggests that any mechanisms in place are not fit for purpose and UNRWA not only fails to address a problematic curriculum, but perpetuates the hate with their own materials.

15. MFAT officials claim that UNRWA provides stability in the region and without New Zealand funding there would be no ability for UNRWA to continue.

a. New Zealand's contribution is approximately 0.06% of UNRWA's overall budget³⁵. It is not clear how this is vital to the survival of the organisation.

b. UNRWA *contributes* to volatility by teaching children to hate and by inciting violence through the textbooks it uses in the schools and allowing the teachers it employs to do so on social media.

i. Democratic US Congressman, Joshua S. Gottheimer, recently said

"Teaching the youngest members of Palestinian society to hate Jews and Israelis fuels the cycle of violence that plagues the region and endangers the safety and security of our most critical ally, Israel." Other US congress members made similar statements³⁶.

ii. The 2019 UN CERD statement³⁷, makes a causal link between the hateful curriculum taught to children and subsequent violent actions.

iii. A 13-year-old Palestinian terrorist who shot and severely wounded two Israelis near the City of David in January³⁸ wrote a message in his school notebook, and was heavily influenced by

³⁴ See <https://bit.ly/3q8T9tH>

³⁵ See paragraph 10

³⁶ See https://bit.ly/Sherman_statement

³⁷ See paragraph 4

³⁸ See https://bit.ly/13yo_terrorist

antisemitic and inciting material found in the textbooks that UNRWA uses.

- c. If the House believes that a delay or freeze of New Zealand's 0.06% budget contribution may destabilise the Middle East and that this is a reason to continue funding UNRWA, then it stands to reason that the House would also be comfortable funding UNRWA if the terror glorified in their classrooms was against Māori or Muslims (or other non-Jewish groups). Else, there is a gross and racist double-standard at play.

16. MFAT officials have claimed that it is acceptable to fund schools that use hateful textbooks because UNRWA is obliged to use the host country texts.

- a. There is ongoing evidence that UNRWA produces material that is egregious (see Part II, and references). Thus, it is not only the textbooks of the host country.
- b. Nowhere in the UN mandate given to UNRWA by the General Assembly does it state that UNRWA is forbidden to use non-host state curricula or alter problematic content in them.

Respected humanitarian groups have proposed a specialised 'refugee curriculum' which is politically unaligned to prevent escalation of conflict through education as recommended by Carnegie Endowment.³⁹ UNRWA's own former legal advisor between 2002-2007 recommended that UNRWA should pay "for separate print runs of local textbooks, modified to be suitable for use by UNRWA students" to "take immediate action with regard to the decades-long saga of improper content in UNRWA textbooks".⁴⁰

- c. UNRWA uses a unique definition for "refugees" that includes people who are citizens of UN member countries⁴¹. Thus, exceptions have been made for UNRWA in one area so it is reasonable to suggest that exceptions could be made to conventions around textbook use if the matter of teaching children to hate and inciting violence against Jews is deemed to be serious.
- d. The logical extension of the argument that UNRWA is obligated to use host nation textbooks (and so it is reasonable to allow them to do so without change) is that it is reasonable for UNRWA schools to use texts from the Palestinian Authority even if they were to glorify the Christchurch terror attacks or attacks against Māori. There is evidenced incitement to violence against Jews in the current material that the New Zealand government funds. The House should not allow this support for terror to continue.

17. MFAT officials have told the Israel Institute of New Zealand they take "**claims about the inclusion of anti-Semitic [sic] teachings in Palestinian Authority textbooks used in UNRWA schools... extremely seriously.**" [emphasis added].

³⁹ See <https://bit.ly/3OuijNL>

⁴⁰ See <https://bit.ly/433QNLA>

⁴¹ See <https://bit.ly/431idSe>

- a. Despite decades of evidenced hateful teaching (see Part II and references), MFAT officials have recommended continuing to fund UNRWA, accepted obviously false promises, made excuses that do not stand scrutiny, and created public messaging that only praises UNRWA.
- b. Furthermore, there is no evidence that officials briefed any minister on the issue of hate in UNRWA schools before there was public pressure and enquiries from the media. This is despite a 2019 report presented by the Israel Institute of New Zealand outlining several issues with UNRWA, including the hateful material presented to children⁴².

Part V: Concluding remarks

18. New Zealand funds schools that present children with material that glorifies terror, promotes violence, and incites hate. These schools are run by an organisation that has claimed to take the matter seriously and acted to address the issues. However, they have been repeatedly found to be unable or unwilling to take appropriate measures or provide details of their activities. They have also produced their own problematic material which they tried to cover up when exposed.
19. The antisemitic hate and glorification of violence against Jews in UNRWA schools is the only known example of such incitement that the New Zealand government funds. The House should not allow this exceptionalism to continue.
20. I look forward to your response and would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Nāku noa, nā.



David Cumin
Co-director
Israel Institute of New Zealand

⁴² See https://bit.ly/IINZ_UNRWA_report2019