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June 30, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for taking a clear stand against the ongoing problem of hateful content in the educational materials used at schools in the Gaza Strip and West Bank administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Alongside ADL's longstanding concerns related to different aspects of UNRWA's mission, role, and conduct, we are particularly troubled by the incitement in certain textbooks that are used in UNRWA's schools.

As such, we particularly appreciated your forthright commitment in Congressional Q&A that the U.S. Government is "determined that UNRWA pursue very necessary reforms in terms of some of the abuses of the system that have taken place in the past, particularly the challenge that we've seen in disseminating in its educational products antisemitic or anti-Israel information."¹

Notably, you also elaborated that UNRWA is "making sure that they have in place processes to prevent that from occurring going forward, we're looking at that very, very carefully."²

We agree that such proactive oversight by the U.S. government is especially important, given that UNRWA has been sporadically acknowledging and then failing to address this problem for decades. The recently released report commissioned by the European Union that identified extensive antisemitic incitement in Palestinian Authority textbooks was no aberration. As far back as 1957, for example, JTA reported that "UNRWA... has agreed to strike out of textbooks used in its schools for refugees passages which incite hatred of Israel."³

¹ Haley Cohen, "US to aid UNRWA on condition of new curriculum," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 11, 2021. (<https://www.jpost.com/american-politics/secretary-blinken-calls-out-unrwa-antisemitism-in-us-congress-670482>)

² *A Review of the FY22 State Department Budget Request*: Hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, June 8, 2021. (<https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/hearings/a-review-of-the-fy22-state-department-budget-request1>)

³ "U.S. Advocates Assurances for Israel at United Nations Assembly Debate," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 29, 1957. (http://pdfs.jta.org/1957/1957-01-29_020.pdf)

So clearly, such promises are inadequate if sufficient oversight and follow-through does not occur.

Based on ADL's experience in trying to advocate for the removal of antisemitic passages from curricula in other parts of the world, we've learned that transparency about what is and is not being taught is absolutely essential, as is the consistent follow-through that only NGOs with expertise and motivation to persist on the matter can provide.

For example, the State Department has occasionally tried to engage the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on incitement in its official curricula for nearly two decades after 9/11, but substantial positive improvements only truly began to happen when there was year-on-year reporting about what was actually in the kingdom's textbooks by NGOs, since the State Department simply is not equipped to devote enough staff time to monitoring the books in that level of detail each school year.

Furthermore, with regard to UNRWA, the problem is further complicated by the fact that there is no systematic transparency – and to our knowledge has never been – about exactly which pages from host government curricula are taught in UNRWA schools versus which ones are skipped over. UNRWA claims it skips all intolerant passages, but we know from experience that it has consistently failed to accurately identify all such passages, let alone subsequently implement such instructions in its schools. And it has refused to disclose to us or other NGOs what is taught either.

As the U.S. Government negotiates its forthcoming Framework for Cooperation with UNRWA for guiding annual cooperation and U.S. assistance to the organization, that undoubtedly must include an explicit commitment by UNRWA to remove all educational content from its schools that teaches hate or glorifies violence. But as part of operationalizing such a requirement, we believe that UNRWA should be expected to commit as an urgent priority to having its syllabi publicly posted at all times.

This simple step ensuring transparency of content is essential – a syllabus for each course taught at its UNRWA schools which indicates exactly which pages from the host government's textbooks are and are not taught in UNRWA's schools. Such information is not systematically posted at all times for all subjects and courses on UNRWA's Digital Learning Platform *keeplearning.unrwa.org* – which also currently displays zero information about the most problematic course subjects in the PA books – and the site is nowhere near close to doing so for any other subject either. Moreover, such a move would be cost effective for UNRWA to implement, and is a basic level of transparency that should be expected for hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. taxpayer money to continue to fund UNRWA's

activities. If this content is not visible, there can be no real information about whether UNRWA is or is not teaching content that incites antisemitic hatred or violence, and whether such aid should be seriously reconsidered.

Therefore, we respectfully recommend you consider language such as this in the next Framework for Cooperation with UNRWA:

“The US and UNRWA agree that UNRWA shall urgently and at all times post publicly in full a specific listing of which pages from each of the host government’s textbooks for each course that it does or does not utilize in UNRWA schools in the West Bank and Gaza (as well as Jordan, Syria, or Lebanon), in addition to disclosing the contents of any other materials UNRWA schools use as substitutes or supplements to these pages.”

For example, disturbing passages documented in current Palestinian Authority textbooks in grade levels covered by UNRWA suggest that Jews “scheme,” are “enemies of Islam,” collectively sought to murder the Prophet Muhammad, demean Muslim women, and have no historical or religious connection to any holy sites in Jerusalem.⁴ Jews are also apparently included in a current PA textbook passage regarding “the wisdom of fighting the infidels” that discusses “annihilating the enemies and killing them.”⁵ We currently have no way of knowing if UNRWA teaches these pages or not. Likewise, we have no way of knowing whether UNRWA schools in Jordan teach the page from a current 7th grade Jordanian textbook identified by ADL this year which states that “treason and the breaking of pacts are among the characteristics of the Jews.”⁶

Mr. Secretary, when you announced the resumption of major categories of U.S. aid to the Palestinian people in April, ADL welcomed this step, adding that “This critical aid will improve lives while hopefully helping advance progress between Israel and the Palestinians,” even as we expressed ADL’s concern that “UNRWA schools continue to disseminate content that is antisemitic, delegitimizes Israel, and encourages violence. The US must pursue binding commitments for transparent, effective reform.”⁷

⁴ “The 2020-21 Palestinian School Curriculum Grades 1-12: Selected Examples,” *IMPACT-se*, May 2021. (https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-Reports_-Updated-Selected-Examples_May-2021.pdf)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David Andrew Weinberg, “Antisemitism in Jordanian Textbooks,” *ADL*, March 31, 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/antisemitism-in-jordanian-textbooks>)

⁷ @ADL. “Reply to Statement by Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken.” *Twitter*, April 7, 2021. (<https://mobile.twitter.com/adl/status/1379945525902999554>)

We held out hope that you would be able to elicit real transparency from UNRWA in this regard, including the important and simple step of UNRWA making clear which pages it is (and isn't) teaching from the PA's hateful textbooks.

We continue to stand ready to work with you to help move this process along if there is any additional information ADL can provide that would help in this regard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Greenblatt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jonathan" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Greenblatt".

Jonathan Greenblatt
CEO and National Director

CC:

Her Excellency Linda Thomas-Greenfield, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
The Honorable Hady Amr, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs

The Honorable Nancy Izzo Jackson, Senior Bureau Official, State Department
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration