

## United Nations Watch Written Statement

### UN Must Address Antisemitism at UNRWA, Item 9

United Nations Watch is concerned by the failure of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to adequately address and remedy the problem of incitement to antisemitism and terrorism among its staff. Just last month, United Nations Watch published a new report exposing 22 UNRWA staff Facebook pages containing antisemitism and terrorist incitement in addition to 100 such pages previously exposed.<sup>1</sup> After coming under pressure from donor states, UNRWA responded by announcing investigations of 10 of its staffers, expressing concern that “some of the posts” detailed in UN Watch’s report “violate [UNRWA] rules and policies.”<sup>2</sup> UNRWA also stated that it had penalized up to 40 employees exposed by UN Watch in the past by censuring them and/or imposing financial penalties.<sup>3</sup>

Previously, UNRWA had never publicized what, if any, disciplinary actions it had taken against the antisemitic and terror-supporting staff identified in our reports. Since 2015, UNRWA has repeatedly refused to engage with United Nations Watch, an accredited NGO with the United Nations, regarding evidence of their teachers’ incitement. Furthermore, as documented in our report, UNRWA has ignored direct requests to its leadership, including correspondence sent directly to the previous head of UNRWA.

Instead, in its public statements, UNRWA repeatedly chose to avoid the actual problem, which is the fact that it employs antisemitic and terrorist-supporting staff. For example, in a December 2018 fact-sheet titled “UNRWA and neutrality”<sup>4</sup>—an apparent reaction to our reports—UNRWA touted its new social media policies and neutrality training. However, information uncovered by United Nations Watch revealed that the social media training encouraged staff to “limit their online exposure” by “taking advantage of privacy and other settings,” thus avoiding the underlying problem of antisemitism and support for terrorism among UNRWA staff.<sup>5</sup>

In its latest statement, UNRWA continues to avoid the core problem—that the agency employs dozens of teachers and school principals who quote Hitler and praise Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist attacks. United Nations Watch’s recent report documents how these staff ultimately harm Palestinian children. For example, they refused to attend curriculum training sessions on complementary material developed by UNRWA to address antisemitic and anti-peace content in

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<sup>1</sup> *Report: UN Teachers Celebrate Deaths of Israelis*, UN WATCH (Aug. 2, 2021), <https://unwatch.org/report-un-teachers-celebrate-deaths-of-israelis/>; *UN Watch reports on UNRWA staff antisemitism and incitement to terrorism*, UN WATCH (Dec. 16, 2020), <https://unwatch.org/un-watch-reports-on-unrwa-staff-antisemitism-and-incitement-to-terrorism/>.

<sup>2</sup> UNRWA Statement on UN Watch Allegations, UNRWA (Aug. 5, 2021), <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-statement-un-watch-allegations>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *UNRWA and neutrality*, UNRWA (2018), [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa\\_neutrality\\_factsheet\\_2018\\_final\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_neutrality_factsheet_2018_final_eng.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> *Social media & neutrality training for managers and supervisors*, UNRWA (2017), <https://www.unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/UNRWA-social-media-training.pdf>.

UNRWA’s Palestinian Authority-authored textbooks because they objected to the materials;<sup>6</sup> and they prepared their own complementary material used during COVID-19, which according to IMPACT-se director Marcus Sheff, was “in places, more extremist than the PA material it complements.”<sup>7</sup>

Aside from grossly violating UN and UNRWA internal policies concerning staff neutrality and impartiality, UNRWA staff incitement to antisemitism also breaches several provisions of the International Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Since UNRWA functions as a state when it provides educational services to Palestinian children in place of the Palestinian Authority (“PA”) or Hamas, it should comply with that treaty. Notably, in August 2019, when the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination reviewed the State of Palestine, it criticized the existence of hate speech in “school curricula and textbooks” (those used by UNRWA) which it said “fuels hatred and may incite violence, particularly hate speech against Israelis, which at times also fuels antisemitism.”<sup>8</sup>

Our research shows that the problem goes beyond the textbooks, and is systemic. United Nations Watch has documented that for every UNRWA teacher that praises Hitler or Hamas terrorist attacks on social media, there are dozens of that teacher’s UNRWA colleagues (see report at pp. 46, 47, 162 & 195)<sup>9</sup> and students who endorse the posts.<sup>10</sup>

The phenomenon actually dates back to UNRWA’s early days. In their new authoritative book *The War of Return*, UNRWA experts Dr. Einat Wilf and Adi Schwartz describe the indoctrination in UNRWA schools in the 1960s, 70s and 80s:

The teachers were Palestinians—refugees and their offspring in the camps—who passed on their personal experiences. Pupils reported that their teachers were faithful to the national struggle...

UNRWA’s schools repeatedly emphasized the idea of a violent return to the territory of the state of Israel...

All the maps of Palestine used in the schools showed the whole of Israel painted in black...

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<sup>6</sup> State has taken actions to address potentially problematic textbook content but should improve its reporting to Congress, GAO (June 2019), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-448.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Monitoring group: UNRWA textbooks glorify terror, deny Israel’s existence, TIMES OF ISRAEL (Jan. 14, 2021), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/monitoring-group-unrwa-textbooks-glorify-terror-deny-israels-existence/>.

<sup>8</sup> Concluding observations on the combined initial and second periodic reports of the State of Palestine, UN Doc. CERD/C/PSE/CO/1-2, ¶ 19 (c) (Aug. 29, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> @HillelNeuer, TWITTER (Aug. 6, 2021, 2:30 PM), <https://twitter.com/HillelNeuer/status/1423607376523968513>; *Enhanced Due Diligence? An Examination of Canada’s Pledge to Stop UNRWA Teachers From Inciting Jihadist Terrorism and Antisemitism*, UN WATCH (April 2017), <https://unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Canada-and-UNRWA-Enhanced-Due-Diligence.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ghanem Naim Ghoneim, *Teacher at UNRWA, Venerates “Wonderful” Hitler*, UN WATCH (Feb. 6, 2017), <https://unwatch.org/ghanem-naim-ghoneim-teacher-unrwa-venerates-wonderful-hitler/>.

UNRWA's education system effectively became an instrument for the mobilization of the population of the camps for the Palestinian armed struggle...11<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the issue isn't UNRWA staff social media posts and so-called 'neutrality breaches,' but rather the fact that UNRWA's education system is repeatedly hiring and putting in the classroom teachers that admire Hitler and propagate hatred and terrorism. Moreover, deleting a post on Facebook does not solve the problem; it does not remove the hate in those teachers' hearts and minds. Defending itself, as UNRWA seeks to do, on the grounds that certain teachers were not employed with UNRWA at the time they advocated racism or terrorism is likewise beside the point. Palestinian children deserve to be fully protected from teachers of hatred and racism. Yet it is clear that deep-rooted antisemitism and support for terrorism among UNRWA staff negates UNRWA's mandate to provide education consistent with UN values and principles to its 526,000 Palestinian students.

UNRWA staff Facebook pages containing incitement and antisemitism exposed in UN Watch's latest report include:

- **Nahed Sharawi**, UNRWA Gaza math teacher who incited classic antisemitism by depicting Jews as scheming thieves<sup>12</sup><sup>12</sup> and shared a video of Hitler with inspirational quotes to "enrich and enlighten your thoughts and minds."<sup>13</sup><sup>13</sup>
- **Husni Masri**, UNRWA West Bank teacher who posted inflammatory antisemitic conspiracy theories that Jews control the world, created the coronavirus and seek to destroy Islam.<sup>14</sup><sup>14</sup>
- **Saeed Khalaf Abu Freh**, UNRWA Jordan math teacher who incited terrorism by glorifying the terrorist Omar Abu Laila who murdered an Israeli soldier, stole his weapon and then shot to death a 47-year-old Israeli father of 12.<sup>15</sup><sup>15</sup>

UNRWA professes to have "zero tolerance for hatred, incitement to violence or discrimination."<sup>16</sup><sup>16</sup> Zero tolerance in schools means removing racists from the classroom. Around the world, the standard is, in fact, zero tolerance for racism by educators, whether inside or outside the classroom. For example, in the United States in 2020, a professor at Michigan's Ferris State University was fired for antisemitic, racist and homophobic social media posts,

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<sup>11</sup>11 Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf, *The War of Return*, ALL POINTS BOOKS (2020), pp. 122-126.

<sup>12</sup>12 Nahel Sharawi, FACEBOOK (Sep. 3, 2017, 10:08 PM)  
<https://www.facebook.com/nada.alsabah.503/posts/1351684991615754>.

<sup>13</sup>13 Nahed Sharawi, FACEBOOK (Feb. 13, 2018)  
<https://www.facebook.com/nada.alsabah.503/posts/1499392643511654>.

<sup>14</sup>14 Husni Masri, FACEBOOK (Oct. 30, 2020, 9:22 AM),  
<https://www.facebook.com/masricalling/posts/10158629663707068>.

<sup>15</sup>15 Saeed Khalaf Abu Freh, FACEBOOK (Nov. 14, 2020, 12:26 PM),  
<https://www.facebook.com/aaaaabufraih/posts/1538871049656869>.

<sup>16</sup>16 UNRWA statement on the latest European Parliament Resolution, UNRWA (April 30, 2021),  
<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-statement-latest-european-parliament-resolution>.

including about a “Jewish mafia,” and describing COVID-19 as a “Jewish revolution.”<sup>17</sup> In the United Kingdom in 2019, a primary school teacher was dismissed for antisemitic remarks after joking to her class, including 11 Jewish students, about “sending them to the gas chamber” if they did not finish their work. Likewise, in Australia and Canada, teachers have been fired for antisemitism.<sup>18</sup> There is no reason UNRWA should not hold its teachers to the same standards.

United Nations Watch calls on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to appoint an independent and impartial commission of inquiry to fully investigate the pandemic of hate that has infected UNRWA’s educational system. UNRWA has already proven that it is incapable of investigating itself on incitement by its failure to remove a single teacher of hate. United Nations Watch calls on the Special Rapporteur on racism, and all other relevant UN special procedures and mandate-holders, to speak out against antisemitism everywhere, including in supposedly neutral UN agencies like UNRWA.

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<sup>17</sup>Jordan Williams, *Professor in Michigan placed on leave after discovery of ‘racist, anti-Semitic and homophobic slurs,’* THE HILL (Nov. 24, 2020), <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/527321-professor-in-michigan-placed-on-leave-after-discovery-of-racist-anti->

<sup>18</sup>Matt Drake, *Teacher sacked ‘after gas chamber joke to Jewish pupils,’* INDEPENDENT (Oct. 16, 2019), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/teacher-sacked-gas-chamber-newberries-primary-school-hertfordshire-a9157896.html>.