

Statement on UNRWA's Response to IMPACT-se Report

March 23, 2023

UNRWA's latest [statement](#) on our joint report with UN Watch, which reviewed institutional UNRWA-branded teaching materials self-produced by the agency's education departments and schools, does not question the facts of the report.

UNRWA clumsily accuses IMPACT-se of "*sometimes give[ing] misguided conclusions,*" without offering one single proof as to the nature of these conclusions. It then falsely claims that five allegations were repeated from a previous report, without asserting which allegations. In fact, none of the analyzed institutional teaching materials created by UNRWA in the report have ever been previously reviewed by IMPACT-se. Then, it claims to be "already addressing" these allegations, without providing any evidence, results, or conclusions.

Finally, UNRWA again reverts to vilifying IMPACT-se by repeating an unsubstantiated and baseless slur made against IMPACT-se by a German research institute, which is named after a former Nazi. The German institute's credibility was repeatedly brought into question by European media and parliamentarians after it admitted to researching the wrong textbooks, for mistranslations, ignoring antisemitism and violence.

The facts: UNRWA teaching materials

The problematic teaching materials outlined in our report were institutionally created by UNRWA's own education departments and staff, and are not limited to the separate allegations against "31 alleged staff members" referenced in UNRWA's statement. IMPACT-se possesses many more examples of such material labeled for use and taught in additional verified UNRWA schools – this selection is illustrative.

The teaching materials in question include over 300 pages of analyzed content labeled for use between 2021-2023, obtained from at least five separate and freely available open-source platforms, spanning many grades, across 10 verified UNRWA schools, educating thousands of children.

This isn't the first occurrence of problematic institutional materials produced, and routinely used, by UNRWA. This is the fourth time since 2021 that IMPACT-se has encountered such material created by UNRWA. This teaching material carries UNRWA's logo, the names of its schools on the cover, and lists of contributing UNRWA staff, including school principals, vice principals, educational experts, and teachers, whose names are signed on the hateful content – in every respect, institutionally created, approved, and taught.

For instance, [example 1.1.3](#) in the report covers an examination posted in January 2023, featuring the UNRWA logo for fifth grade, labeled for the end of the first semester of 2022-23 and produced by UNRWA's "Center of Educational Development – Evaluation Unit," which is marked on the cover page of the exam. It teaches that "Liberating the Al-Aqsa Mosque and making sacrifices for it is an obligation for all Muslims." This is not an ad-hoc initiative by a single UNRWA teacher or school; it is an examination created by UNRWA's centralized education center in Gaza, most likely intended for all UNRWA primary schools across Gaza.

Equally concerning is that, in a similar vein to IMPACT-se's July 2022 UNRWA [report](#) reviewing institutional teaching materials self-created by UNRWA, these materials were yet again kept off UNRWA's new Digital Learning Platform (DLP), which UNRWA [claims](#) is the sole source of learning materials self-produced by the agency. Instead, they were likely distributed to thousands of students through various platforms and channels and taught in classrooms.

By not placing this material on its DLP and then claiming the DLP is the only source of self-produced content that the agency uses for teaching, UNRWA has created a public relations pathway to distance itself from these problematic UNRWA-branded teaching materials. And yet, the material damage from teaching these inflammatory materials is not alleviated.

UNRWA fails to mention why examples were kept off UNRWA's DLP, and why examples were found directing students to study hateful passages by referring to specific page numbers in Palestinian textbooks used in its schools – passages which UNRWA [claims](#) it instructs teachers to skip or teach differently.

In fact, UNRWA's long-standing teaching practice is the routine production of a great deal of UNRWA-branded content not aligned with UN values, by education departments and employees, both before and after UNRWA's April 2021 launch of its DLP.

UNRWA fails to provide answers as to how the report's findings contradict statements and promises made very recently by UNRWA to donor nations: 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 them.

Moreover, despite claiming in its statement that UNRWA teachers receive "mandatory" [training](#) on humanitarian principles such as neutrality, non-violence, tolerance, and conflict resolution, UNRWA fails to explain how and why the teachers that UNRWA admits are responsible for drafting problematic content are the same teachers that are trained extensively in countering hate.

Incitement to antisemitism, hate, and violence in UNRWA education is a deeply rooted systemic problem, and UNRWA's internal auditing mechanisms are neither capable of addressing the issue nor fit for purpose. To put this into perspective, in this [article](#) from 1957, UNRWA promised to remove incitement from Egyptian textbooks in Gaza, showing that this is a persistent problem.

We hope that UNRWA will avoid repeating past [bizarre and unbelievable claims](#) that deflect responsibility, by insisting that hundreds of documented pages of institutional self-created teaching material were illegally created by unnamed sources utilizing the agency's logo and employee names, and that they were "not authorized for use in any UNRWA school." To help avoid these implausible claims, this report captures evidence taken from inside UNRWA classrooms, showing the teaching of these materials.

We hope that UNRWA will take responsibility for its duty of care to children, and to donor nations and their taxpayers. School education is the key to fostering peaceful, tolerant societies. IMPACT-se is committed to ensuring the next generation is educated according to values of peace, coexistence, religious tolerance, and a shared future. We call again on UNRWA, and not for the first time, to eliminate antisemitism, violence, and hate, taught in its schools by its employees: to address education in an

effective manner, rather than treating the management of school education as if it were a fundraising and public relations exercise.

UN Director of the Middle East Division at the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Dr. Darko Mocibob was “easily convinced” by IMPACT-se’s 2021 report on UNRWA’s self-produced teaching material, and reaffirmed that there “shouldn’t be any percentage of such content which is antisemitic or worse in the UNRWA textbooks.” Unfortunately, nothing has changed in two years. UNRWA and donor nations must fully uphold the [stated policy](#) of “zero tolerance for racism, discrimination, or antisemitism in its schools and educational materials,” and UNRWA’s [promise](#) that any breach of this policy is dealt with firmly.

UNRWA attacks

UNRWA repeats an unsubstantiated and baseless slur made against IMPACT-se by a German research institute, which is named after a former Nazi who volunteered for Hitler’s Brownshirts. UNRWA was warned by European parliament members to desist from these unsupported and ad hominem attacks.

The German institute’s credibility was brought into question by [British](#) and German media ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) for *inter alia*, admitting to researching the wrong textbooks, for mistranslations, for ignoring antisemitism and violence. European parliament members [demanded](#) that the EU cease cooperation with the institute. UK parliamentarians raised concerns with the government ([here](#) and [here](#)) over the institute’s Arabic translation errors, flawed methodologies, and competency, describing it as “not fit for purpose” and calling on the UK government to disassociate itself from it.

Ironically, the institute itself [published](#) IMPACT-se’s research and praised its methodologies, which it says are “*based on page-by-page scrutiny [...] made according to UNESCO recommendations and principles. This way a clear picture had been drawn of the general attitude to the Other and to peace in this region.*”