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About the Report of the Mideast Freedom Forum Study of Palestinian Authority Textbooks

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The recent report compiled about Palestinian textbooks (Website of the Mideast Freedom Forum Berlin (MFFB), March 2016).

Paul Antshel, a Holocaust survivor whose pseudonym is Paul Celan, is today considered one of Germany's leading modern poets. He wrote a chilling poem called "Death Fugue" (*Todesfuge*) about life in a concentration camp, which begins,

"Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening/we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night/we drink and we drink..." Every subsequent stanza begins, "Black milk of daybreak..." "Black milk" symbolizes the German character, which embodies both black and white. On the one hand, there is the height of German culture with its transcendent music, and on the other, the death industry and the abyss of its evil. That is the ultimate nexus of opposites.

I was reminded of the opening lines of the poem when I read the report compiled by the Mideast Freedom Forum Berlin (MFFB), which, according to its website, has worked for years "to combat anti-Semitism, hostility towards Israel, Islamism and right-wing extremism." The report, issued on March 12, 2016, was called "Educating the Next Generation. Changing Palestinian Textbooks as a Precondition for Mutual

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Understanding." The main findings appear under the title "An Analysis of the Representation of Israel and Jews in Palestinian Textbooks" (see Appendix).

This report analyzes fifteen schoolbooks from the subjects of history and national education ranging from school Grades 1 to 9, including texts, charts, photographs, illustrations, and maps. It examines what is in the textbooks and what is not. The books were introduced into the Palestinian educational system between 2000 and 2005, and reprinted between 2011 and 2014. They were all still in use at the beginning of 2016 in Palestinian Authority (PA) and UNRWA schools in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. All content was determined by the PA. The principles and guidelines of UNESCO's Education Strategy 2014–2021 were used as guiding criteria for the analysis.

The authors analyzed Palestinian textbooks because they considered them a significant indicator of the values a society desires to pass on to its next generation. "They transmit ideals and knowledge, regarding their own culture and others, that have been accounted worthy to pass on to children. They orient children with regards to social and cultural relations, and help to form an approved, picture of the community into which children grow."² The particular concern of the report was the ability of educational texts to form and/or reduce prejudice, intolerance and biased perceptions

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What the report found was that PA textbooks presented a picture diametrically opposite to the guidelines. **The State of Israel and the Jewish people were totally expunged from regional history in texts, maps and charts. Even on a British Mandate postage stamp the Hebrew inscription "Palestina A-I" [Palestina Eretz Israel, i.e. the Land of Israel, the Hebrew name during the Mandate] has been erased, leaving only the Arabic "Filastin."** Palestinian students learn nothing about the Jewish people, the Holocaust, the 1947 partition and establishment of Jewish and Arab states. They learn about the Jews in history twice: once as the enemies of the Prophet Muhammad, and once about the Jews as Zionist colonialists at the end of the 19th century. **The Jews are represented as the incarnation of evil, violent and cruel. In Grade 2 Palestinian children learn they must hate the Jews and use violence against them.** The return of the refugees to their homes, from which they were expelled by a Zionist imperialist conspiracy, is one of its most important commandments. Not only the descendants of the original refugees, but every

² http://www.mideastfreedomforum.org/fileadmin/editors_de/Broschueren/mffb_brochure_textbooks.pdf, p. 4.

³ Ibid.

Palestinian child. The Jew is black, the Palestinian is white and as pure as the driven snow.

Israeli public discourse focuses on three central concepts: the occupation as the source of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, longed-for peace, and the two-state solution as the best way to settle the conflict. Thus, **in Palestinian textbooks the concept of peace with the Jews does not exist. There is no education for peace and no desire for peace. There is no such thing as the two-state solution, and certainly not two states for two peoples, and definitely not with the Jewish people.** The occupation exists, but it is not the occupation of the Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip, as accepted in Israeli public discourse. It is the occupation of greater Palestine as it appears in the PA textbooks, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Indeed, black milk. It is horrifying, it is depressing, but anyone capable of understanding what he sees needs only to look and the real picture will be obvious. The black milk of the schools added to the black milk the child receives from his family, the street, the religious lessons in the mosques, the incitement in the media, friction with IDF soldiers – those are the components of the real picture of the lives of the younger Palestinian generation. What are we supposed to do? Despair? Give up the struggle for peace, which is our highest commandment? No. But we have to better understand the Palestinian social and cultural Iron Curtain we face.

Appendix

The Main Findings of the MFFB Report

An Analysis of the Representation of Israel and Jews in Palestinian Textbooks

Summary

This analysis of Palestinian school textbooks from Grades 1 to 9 demonstrates that the educational contents do not encourage a constructive understanding of Israelis and Palestinians. Instead, they propagate a climate of violence.

The following report shows that:

Palestinian school pupils do not gather any balanced information about Jewish culture, religion, or history, or about modern Israeli society.

- The predominant reasons for Jewish immigration to Palestine, namely anti-Semitism and the Shoah, are never mentioned.
- The surveyed textbooks consistently portray Jews in a strongly negative manner, and often demonize them. Jews are rarely individuated, but instead are subsumed into a stereotype or the concept of Zionism.
- The textbooks reveal serious omissions regarding Jews within the historical context of Palestine. They first appear as Zionist colonizers and settlers at the end of the nineteenth century.
- The effect of this is that the Jewish presence in modern Israel is delegitimized.
- Jewish and Israeli places, as well as the State of Israel as a whole, are not found on maps included in the textbooks. The existence of Israel is denied.
- Instead, the maps label the area inside the modern borders of Israel, including the West Bank and Gaza, as 'Palestine'.
- The terminology with which the books refer to Jews and Israelis is not neutral, but often pejorative. The contrast between them and Palestinians akin to that is between evil and good. The Palestinian resistance against Jews is glorified.

In conclusion, the content of official Palestinian textbooks is detrimental to fostering understanding between the two groups. The books do not appeal to the possibility of

understanding and reconciliation, but rather encourage aggression and strengthen prejudices. They describe Palestinians and Israelis as enemies, and contain nothing to render mutual understanding a likelihood.

To ensure that coming generations work toward a process of peace rather than conflict, children must be provided with more balanced and informative learning content.