



The Palestinian Authority, senior Palestinian religious leaders and local figures in east Jerusalem are waging a campaign to keep the Israeli curriculum out of east Jerusalem schools.

February 5, 2018

In recent months Palestinians have been waging a campaign in Jerusalem to prevent the introduction of the Israeli curriculum into Palestinian educational institutions in east Jerusalem. The campaign was accelerated in recent weeks, apparently because the Jerusalem municipality began registering children in the schools in east Jerusalem for the 2018-2019 school year. **Online registration became possible** (which made the Palestinians suspicious). The claim of the campaign is that the objective of using the Israeli curriculum in east Jerusalem is to **erase the Arab Palestinian identity and inculcate the Palestinian students with the Israeli narrative.**

► **Three groups participate in the campaign:**

- ◆ The **Palestinian Authority (PA)**, led by **Sabri Sidam**, the PA's minister of **education** who announced a series of **practical measures** his ministry is planning to take in support of schools, teachers and students. The objective is to prevent the introduction of the Israeli curriculum and strengthen Palestinian education in east Jerusalem.
- ◆ **Senior religious leaders Sheikh Muhammad Hussein**, the mufti of Jerusalem and the PA, and **Sheikh Ikrima Sabri**, the imam of al-Aqsa mosque and chairman of the supreme Islamic authority. The two issued religious opinions forbidding the teaching of the Israeli curriculum.
- ◆ **The central parents' committee of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem**, headed by **Ziyad al-Shimali**. He has been very active on the ground and in the media, and leads a broad campaign against the use of the Israeli curriculum in east Jerusalem.



Facebook page post equating the Israeli curriculum with garbage. The Arabic reads, "The intellectual garbage for our children will remain extremely dangerous for society, more than the garbage found in the streets...the Israeli curriculum (Facebook page of the parents' committee of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem, January 2, 2018).

- ▶ In September 2017 **Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the mufti of Jerusalem and the PA,** issued a *fatwa* forbidding the use of the Israeli curriculum in schools in east Jerusalem. He was joined by **Sheikh Ikrima Sabri,** the imam of al-Aqsa mosque. **Sabri Sidam, the PA minister of education,** said in December 2017 **that his ministry would begin to take practical steps to implement Sheikh Muhammad Hussein's *fatwa*.** They included **providing support for educational institutions** in east Jerusalem, giving **financial grants to teachers and students** in east Jerusalem, and **supplying the students with PA textbooks.**
- ▶ The steps are accompanied by **a campaign waged by the central parents' committee, whose objective is to "purify the Palestinian schools in east Jerusalem of the Israeli curriculum."** In ITIC assessment the campaign is coordinated with the Palestinian ministry of education. A press conference was held with the participation of Adnan al-Husseini, the PA's minister for Jerusalem affairs, and Ikrima Sabri, the imam of al-Aqsa. The parents' committee is also **waging a propaganda campaign on Facebook,** distributes brochures and holds meetings with parents in east Jerusalem (in the Beit Hanina neighborhood, for example).
- ▶ **To what extent has the Israeli curriculum been introduced into the schools in east Jerusalem?**
 - ◆ The number of students in east Jerusalem who study the Israeli curriculum **is continually rising.** According to information from the Jerusalem municipality, **during the current school [2017-2018] year 5,800 students in east Jerusalem study the Israeli curriculum, an increase of 14% over the previous year [2016-2017]**

(Jerusalem News, an article by Alon Levi entitled, "The war of the Israeli matriculation exams," January 26, 2018). The Israeli ministry of the education is of the opinion that the number might potentially continue to grow. Meir Shimoni, director of the Jerusalem district in the ministry of education, said that "the surveys we carried out indicate that about 50% of the parents in east Jerusalem want their children to pass the Israeli matriculation exams" (conversation between Alon Levi from the local newspaper Jerusalem News and Meir Shimoni).

◆ However, compared with the overall number of students in educational institutions in east Jerusalem, **the number of students studying the Israeli curriculum is low**. In the 2015-2016 school year there were 111,600 students in Palestinian educational institutions in east Jerusalem.¹ **The overwhelming majority studied the Palestinian curriculum and only 5% studied the Israeli curriculum.**

Thus the question raised is, what prompted senior PA figures, senior religious figures and parents to take action against the "danger" of the introduction of the Israeli curriculum into schools in east Jerusalem? Apparently they regard the rise in the number of students studying the Israeli curriculum **as potentially dangerous**, even if the number is still small, and **are concerned of erosion if more students see advantages in having an Israeli matriculation certificate** (it is also possible that the Jerusalem municipality's online registration increased their concerns). In addition, the Palestinians **are oversensitive to any step Israel taken in Jerusalem**, especially concerning an issue as important as education, **given the tension following Trump's declaration of American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.**

¹ In the 2015-2016 school year there were **111,600 students in east Jerusalem**: 90,600 in public schools and 21,000 in private schools (Yearbook of statistics for Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2017).



Notice posted to Facebook warning parents of students of online registration for the Israeli curriculum. On a screenshot of the Jerusalem municipality website, a note was added reading, "For parents registering their children for the new school year. Very important warning." Parents are called on to choose the Palestinian curriculum, not the Israeli (Facebook page of the parents' committee of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem, January 20, 2018).

In conclusion, despite the rise in the number of students studying according to the Israeli curriculum, **most of the students in east Jerusalem study according to the PA curriculum and use its textbooks**. In ITIC assessment, it is doubtful whether the situation will change significantly in the coming years. **The PA textbooks teach the delegitimization of the State of Israel, demonize it and preach a violent struggle against it** until the liberation of all the territories of Palestine² (in which the formal educational system is joined by the informal). That means **the younger generation in east Jerusalem is educated for hatred of and violence towards Israel, in addition to already feeling deeply deprived**.³ All of the above contribute to turning the Arab neighborhoods in **east Jerusalem into hotbeds of incitement, violence and terrorism**, as was repeatedly illustrated by the wave of popular terrorism that began in October 2015.

² Conclusions drawn from the studies done by Dr. Arnon Groiss and Dr. Roni Shaked, "Schoolbooks of the Palestinian Authority (PA): The Attitude to the Jews, to Israel and to Peace." The study was published by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. The results of the study validated findings from other studies of Palestinian textbooks issued by the ITIC website.

³ The **feelings of deprivation** of the residents of east Jerusalem are increased by **the easy access they have to the western part of the city**, and their frequent meetings with the difference in the conditions between the two sectors of the same city.



"The national campaign to purify the schools in [east] Jerusalem of the Israeli curriculum" (Facebook page of the parents' committee of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem, January 20, 2018): On the right side is a PA academic tenth grade geography textbook. The cover features a map of Palestine, in which Israel does not appear, all the territory covered by the Palestinian flag. It is a familiar graphic frequently used to send the message that all Palestine belongs only to the Palestinians.

► For information about the activity of institutions and Palestinian senior figures against the Israeli curriculum see:

- ◆ **Appendix A** – Steps taken by the PA to reinforce Palestinian education in east Jerusalem.
- ◆ **Appendix B** – The campaign of the central parents' committee in east Jerusalem against the Israeli curriculum.
- ◆ **Appendix C** – Religious opinions issued by senior religious figures banning the teaching of the Israeli curriculum in east Jerusalem.

Appendix A

Steps taken by the PA to reinforce Palestinian education in east Jerusalem

► On December 6, 2017, the ministry of education in Ramallah announced it had **begun steps to implement sheikh Muhammad Hussein's *fatwa* regarding the ban on teaching the Israeli curriculum in Palestinian schools in Jerusalem** (see Appendix B). according to **Sabri Sidam, PA minister of education**, the steps included **broadening the program for protecting Palestinian education in east Jerusalem; providing support and reinforcing the firm stance of the Palestinian educational institutions in Jerusalem; supplying textbooks written according to the Palestinian curriculum**, opposing all the actions to "Judaize" education in east Jerusalem to make it Israeli (website of the Palestinian ministry of education, December 6, 2017). On December 20, 2017 Sabri Sidam announced his ministry would begin giving grants to teachers of the Jerusalem educational administration (website of the Palestinian ministry of education, December 20, 2017).

An examination of the PA budget for 2017 revealed that the PA **was supposed to invest 222 million Israeli shekels (about \$64.3 million) in educational projects in Jerusalem**. That was "to support the firm stance of the residents of [east] Jerusalem" (website of the PA treasury). The PA budget for 2018 is so far unknown but apparently **the ministry of education has sufficient resources to support the statements made by the minister of education with activity on the ground**.



Sabri Sidam, PA minister of education
(Facebook page of Sabri Sidam, September 4, 2015).

- ▶ **Minister of Education Sabri Sidam** praised the "important *fatwa*" issued by Sheikh Muhammad Hussein (on September 20, 2017). He said it had been issued at a time when the [Israeli] "occupation" was waging a "cruel attack" on education in east Jerusalem and on the Palestinian curriculum. He said the *fatwa* was consistent with **the concept of the Palestinian ministry of education, which adhered to preserving Palestinian national identity in Jerusalem, and preserving Palestinian history from distortion and disruption**. He added that most of the residents of east Jerusalem were united around the *fatwa*, whose objective was to preserve their national identity in Jerusalem, **especially in view of the "racism" of the United States** and its intention to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem (website of the Palestinian ministry of education, December 6, 2017).
- ▶ On **January 21, 2018**, following **the launching of the Jerusalem municipality's Arabic website for student registration** for the coming school year, the Palestinian ministry of education in Ramallah **issued a warning** to the residents of east Jerusalem about the procedure of online registration. It claimed **the choice between the Israeli curriculum and the Palestinian curriculum was not sufficiently clear** and parents might make a mistake when registering their children. The ministry called on parents' committees in east Jerusalem and on parents themselves to be aware and **to resist Israel's attempts to take control of education [in east Jerusalem] and of "the students' minds"** (Facebook page of the PA ministry of education, January 21, 2018).

Appendix B

The campaign of the central parents' committee in east Jerusalem against the Israeli curriculum

On December 28, 2017, a press conference was held to launch a campaign "**to purify the schools in east Jerusalem of the Israeli curriculum.**" The campaign is directed by the **central parents' committee of Palestinian students in East Jerusalem.** In ITIC assessment, behind it are **the PA and senior Palestinian religious figures in the PA and Jerusalem,** who in recent months have conducted intensive activity against the introduction of the Israeli curriculum into (educational institutions in east Jerusalem). On January 26, 2018, a sub-campaign was launched on the social networks called "The national campaign to purify the schools in [east] Jerusalem of the Israeli curriculum."



"The national campaign to purify the schools in [east] Jerusalem of the Israeli curriculum" (Facebook page of the parents' committee of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem, January 20, 2018): Right: PA academic tenth grade geography textbook hostile to Israel. The cover features a map of Palestine, all the territory covered by the Palestinian flag, with no mention of Israel. It is a familiar graphic frequently used to send the message that all Palestine belongs to the Palestinians.

► The campaign was launched at a meeting after which a press conference was held in the Al-Dar Hotel in east Jerusalem. The press conference was attended by the following people (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, the official PA organ, December 28, 2017):

- ◆ **Samir Jibril**, head of the Palestinian education administration for the Jerusalem district of the Palestinian ministry of education.
- ◆ **Adnan al-Husseini**, minister of Jerusalem affairs in the Palestinian national consensus government.
- ◆ **Sheikh Ikrima Sabri**, senior imam of al-Aqsa mosque and chairman of the supreme Islamic authority in Jerusalem.

- ◆ **Ziyad al-Shimali**, chairman of the central committee of the parents of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem.
- ◆ **Rasem Abeidat**, a political commentator from east Jerusalem affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).
- ▶ **Ziyad al-Shimali** gave a speech in which **he warned of the "spread of the cancer of the Israeli curriculum."** The curriculum, he claimed, threatened the faith of the Palestinians and their presence in Jerusalem. He claimed it was liable to lead to the Palestinian children of east Jerusalem working for the "police force of the occupation" in the future (Watan TV, December 28, 2017).



Launching the parents' campaign to "purify" the Palestinian schools in Jerusalem of the Israeli curriculum. The press conference led by Rasem Abeidat (standing, right). Also present were (left to right) Ziyad al-Shimali, head of the committee of the parents of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem; Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, imam of al-Aqsa mosque and head of the supreme Islamic authority in Jerusalem; Adnan Husseini, Palestinian minister for Jerusalem affairs (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, December 28, 2017).



They were joined by Samir Jibril (sitting, right), head of the Palestinian education administration for east Jerusalem (Facebook page of the parents' committee of Palestinian students in east Jerusalem, December 28, 2017).

► At the launching of the campaign the Israeli program for "Judaizing" education in the Arab schools in east Jerusalem was presented. The attendees stressed that **its objective was to erase the Palestinian Arab Islamic and Christian identity in east Jerusalem**. A decision was made to incorporate all the [educational] institutions in the struggle against Israel. The parents' committee **warned the parents of students about registering their children for the next school year on the website without examining the institution**. The committee also threatened **to take legal action and exercise the rule of the clans against schools in east Jerusalem that taught the Israeli curriculum**⁴ (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, December 28, 2017).

Other activity conducted by the central parents' committee

Meeting held in Beit Hanina with parents of students

► On January 5, 2018, the parents' committee held a meeting with the parents of students in the Beit Hanina neighborhood, northern Jerusalem. The committee presented the dangers inherent in implementing the Israeli curriculum in east Jerusalem (Panet, January 5, 2018).



A meeting of the Palestinian parents' committee in east Jerusalem with parents of students from Beit Hanina (Panet, January 5, 2018).

⁴ The rule of the clans is a judicial system parallel to the civil judicial system in Israel and the PA territories. In effect it is clan arbitration, in which the clan elders decide important issues brought before them, such as family quarrels and blood feuds. The rule of the clans has great weight and is the final word between the sides. People tend to appeal to the system primarily because of delays and the load of cases dealt with in the judicial systems of Israel and the PA.

curriculum." Apparently the campaign was not well received, with only 277 "Likes" and 279 followers (as of February 1, 2018). The page also posted a call for responses to the hashtag "#rejection_Israeli_curriculum_national_duty" (Facebook page of the national campaign to reject the Israeli curriculum, January 26 and 28, 2018).



Logo of the campaign on the social networks: "The national campaign to reject the Israeli curriculum" (Facebook page of the national campaign to reject the Israeli curriculum, January 26, 2018).



"The national campaign to reject the Israeli curriculum. The objectives of the Israeli curriculum are to inculcate the Zionist concept instead of the Palestinian concept, to take control of Palestinian minds; to obscure the Arab-Islamic-Christian identity of the city of Jerusalem; to raise a generation alienated from its national Palestinian identity; to polish the identity of new generation loyal to the State of Israel" (Facebook page of the national campaign to reject the Israeli curriculum, January 27, 2018).

Ziyad al-Shimali, head of the central parents' committee of east Jerusalem students



Ziyad al-Shimali, head of the central parents' committee of east Jerusalem students, interviewed by an Arab TV channel in Nazareth (Musawa Channel on YouTube, Nazareth, November 7, 2017).

► For the past several months **Ziyad al-Shimali**, who serves as chairman of the central committee of parents of students in east Jerusalem, **has led a broad media campaign against implementing the Israeli curriculum in Arab schools in Jerusalem.** He has **held meetings with residents of east Jerusalem and is often interviewed by the Palestinian and Arab media.** He claims that the Israeli curriculum is **a danger for the future Palestinian generation** because it is a distortion of the Palestinian curriculum and harms the Palestinian cause and Jerusalem (Panet, September 10, 2017).

Conference of school principals in east Jerusalem

► A conference of school principals was recently held in east Jerusalem to "**discuss the dangers of introducing the Israeli curriculum.**" The principals issued a statement saying that "the president of the union of principals spoke at the conference about the seriousness and degree of exposure of students in the schools in Jerusalem to the Israeli curriculum. He said the **meeting was part of the campaign to clear the minds of "our students."** The campaign was launched recently and will continue in every neighborhood in the city (Jerusalem News, an article by Alon Levi entitled, "The war of the Israeli matriculation exams," January 26, 2018).

Appendix C

Religious opinions issued by senior religious figures banning the teaching of the Israeli curriculum in east Jerusalem

Fatwa of Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the mufti of Jerusalem and the PA

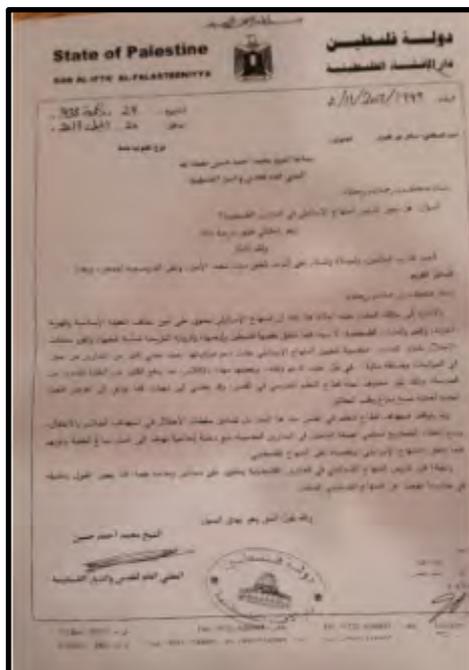
► On September 20, 2017, **Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the mufti of Jerusalem and the PA**, issued a *fatwa* in answer to a question relating to Islamic law he had received: "Could the Israeli curriculum be studied in Palestinian schools [in east Jerusalem]?" His answer was that without a doubt the Israeli curriculum had **elements that contradicted the Islamic faith, Arab identity and Palestinian values**, especially everything dealing with the issue of Palestine and its land, and the historical Palestinian narrative.



Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the mufti of Jerusalem and the PA
(al-Araby al-Jadeed on YouTube, January 24, 2018).

- The mufti claimed that Israel ("the regime of the occupation") administered Palestinian schools in [east] Jerusalem by **implementing the Israeli curriculum in return for transferring budgets to the schools**. He claimed many schools in [east] Jerusalem are burdened with financial hardships and a budget deficit due to lack of financial support, which causes many students to drop out. That raises concerns about the education in the schools in east Jerusalem and also exposes the younger [Palestinian] generation to [Israeli] "brainwashing" and "turning the truth upside down."
- In addition, Muhammad Hussein claimed in the same *fatwa* that Israel continued harming the educational sector in [east] Jerusalem **by detaining students and not issuing entrance permits to teachers from the West Bank who work in east Jerusalem**. That was in addition to **propaganda in the media** calling on students to choose the Israeli curriculum instead of

the Palestinian curriculum. Therefore, he decreed, **studying the Israeli curriculum could be very dangerous and harm the students, and therefore could not be implemented in the Palestinian schools** [in east Jerusalem] (website of the office of the mufti of Jerusalem, January 24, 2018).



The *fatwa* issued by the PA mufti, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein forbidding the use of the Israeli curriculum in Palestinian schools in Jerusalem (website of the Palestinian ministry of education, December 6, 2017).

Sermon of Sheikh Ikrima Sabri forbidding the teaching of the Israeli curriculum

► On September 15, 2017, **Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, the imam of al-Aqsa mosque and chairman of the supreme Islamic authority**, gave the Friday sermon. In it he **forbade teaching Israeli curriculum in the Palestinian schools in east Jerusalem**. He claimed Israel was trying to force the Palestinians to implement the Israeli curriculum, which contradicted Palestinian values, religion, customs, history and culture. He claimed **Israel offered Palestinian students "temptations and benefits."**

► The sheik added that "from the pulpit of al-Aqsa mosque we clearly announce that it is impossible [according to Islamic law] to teach the Israeli curriculum in the schools in Jerusalem, and anyone who does teach it is committing a sin, and anyone who supported and supports it is committing a sin, and anyone who sends his son or daughter to a school where the curriculum is taught is committing a sin. Fathers and mothers must be aware of the danger, and thus we are issuing [this] Islamic law" (Ramallah News, September 16, 2017).



Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, senior imam of al-Aqsa mosque and chairman of the supreme Islamic authority (YouTube, January 10 2018).

- ▶ On another occasion Sheikh Ikrima Sabri said **the Israeli curriculum directly contradicts [Palestinian] values. The Israeli curriculum has a negative influence on the Palestinian student. That has consequence for the student's values, behavior and moral code.** Therefore, Sabri appealed to the parents of students and called on them not to approve the Israeli curriculum and to look for schools where the Palestinian curriculum was taught, which is consistent with [Palestinian] customs (arabi21, September 22, 2017).