**UN malpractice harms Palestinian children - opinion**

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Back in 2017, Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., introduced a House resolution to prohibit “US assistance to Israel from being used to support the military detention, interrogation or ill-treatment of Palestinian children.” It included a proposed budget of $19 million for human rights NGOs to monitor the treatment of 12- to 17-year-old Palestinian youth detained by the Israeli military. Two years ago, a similar bill was introduced and we have no doubt that dozens of Democrats will join McCollum in 2021 to push this narrative which paints a picture of Israelis bent on seeking out innocent children to traumatize with the butts of their rifles or worse.

McCollum is right to raise the issue of the safety and trauma of children everywhere in the world, including the Holy Land. Tragically for targeted and abused Palestinian children, she is willfully blind to the main perpetrators – Palestinian adults, from genocidal Hamas that uses summertime to train child soldiers and to get children to fill balloons not with helium but with kerosene to float towards Israeli kindergartens, to the Palestinian Authority itself which spends more on its diabolical pay-to-slay Jews rewards program than it does on welfare for the poor.

This is a pivotal moment for Palestinians not only because there is a new US president, but because the Middle East peace train has already left the station without them. Don’t blame the Emirates or Bahrain or Morocco. It wasn’t they who boycotted an international conference devoted to improving the economic situation of every Palestinian family, it was the PA and Hamas.

Some of the main enablers of this sorry state of affairs, rife with danger for Palestinian children, lies within the nomenclature of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA.

Scores of donor nations have donated billions to provide health care and education for an unheard of four generations of so-called refugees. Its schools operate in the West Bank, Gaza, east Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Under the protective cloak of the UN, these schools teach narratives that turn innocent children into haters and child soldiers, encouraging kids to put themselves in harm’s way. Palestinian children are serially brainwashed in UNRWA schools to believe that all of Israel was stolen from them and they sing songs about how one day they will exterminate the Jews and return to their families’ homes.

Teaching generation of children to embrace violence and martyrdom, and to hate your neighbor, is a form of societal child abuse. UN agencies have been complicit in allowing this abuse to go on decade after decade in direct violation of its mission statements:

1. UNRWA’s mission “is to help Palestine refugees achieve their full potential in human development under the difficult circumstances in which they live, consistent with internationally agreed goals and standards”; and “UNRWA services are delivered in accordance with the United Nations humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence.”

2. The mission of the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) is “to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential”; and “UNICEF works with all its partners toward the attainment of the sustainable human development goals adopted by the world community and the realization of the vision of peace and social progress enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.” But since 2018, UNICEF in Gaza and the West Bank have been building a false narrative, that would have the world treat the Israel Defense Forces as child abusers!

3. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child: “The child should be brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.” In particular, Article 19 of the convention calls for “legislative, administrative, social and educational actions to protect children from all forms of violence.” UNICEF’s founding statement asserts its mandate is based on this convention.

4. The UN Charter was adopted after the devastation of World War II with the intention to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war … and for these ends, to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors.”

We implore UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to condemn once and for all the antisemitic, intolerant, pro-war, anti-peace education taking place in UNRWA schools. You have been quoted as saying “peace, justice, human dignity, tolerance and solidarity are enshrined in the charter and bind us together.” UNRWA should not be the exception. It too must abide by those lofty ideals. These children deserve better.

President Biden, we implore you to leverage America’s renewed commitment to UNRWA by linking renewed future checks to immediate educational reform. That single policy decision can help break the cycle of systemic child abuse plaguing Palestinian society and help set the table for reconciliation and mutual respect between Palestinians and Israelis.

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