UNICEF ignores PA recruitment of kids to violence

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A UNICEF report addressing the mistreatment of Palestinian children heavily criticized Israel and somewhat criticized Hamas, but ignored evidence against the Palestinian Authority.

The report issued this past weekend covering the year 2019, did not address evidence from a February report by an NGO claiming that the PA uses school textbooks, television broadcasts, active recruitment and payment to terrorists after-the-crime serves to systematically incite and weaponize its child population into soldiers.

While other Israeli groups have also worked on this issue, Palestinian Media Watch’s (PMW) February 2019 and February 2020 reports are unique in tracing the PA’s recruitment step-by-step to explain why a substantial volume of Palestinian minors end up arrested by Israel.

PMW brought the issue to The Jerusalem Post’s attention again on Tuesday.

Contrary to conventional global media wisdom that Israeli occupation is causing innocent Palestinian minors to become violent, the PMW report, which covers 2019, says that PA incitement is the primary cause.

“Damningly, PMW’s report shows how the PA leadership openly admits that the child terrorists are the PA’s soldiers,” said the report.

Moreover, the report’s author, Maurice Hirsch, who also was a former IDF chief prosecutor for the West Bank, submitted a letter to UNICEF demanding that it name the PA’s violations and invest at least as much time in documenting these violations as it does regarding alleged Israeli violations of Palestinian minors’ rights.

Despite receiving PMW’s evidence in February, the UNICEF report issued this past weekend makes no reference to PA mistreatment of their own child population.

Rather, the overwhelming majority of the report alleges Israeli violations of Palestinian children’s rights, with one short section about problematic indoctrination of Palestinian children by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

Hirsch said on Tuesday that PMW’s reports, “left no room for speculation. It is clear that the PA operates a systematic and institutionalized policy and program to recruit child soldiers/terrorists. In implementing its program, the PA does not stop with indoctrinating, brainwashing and weaponizing the children.”

“Rather, perversely, the PA pays the child terrorists’ financial rewards for their acts of terror and even openly admits that it sends the children to carry out those acts… Instead of advocating on behalf of the Palestinian children, UNICEF has chosen to fundamentally betray its mandate and betray the children, while at the same time adopting any anti-Israel lies it is fed by its working-group,” said Hirsch.

UNICEF did not respond on Tuesday regarding omitting alleged problematic conduct by the PA.

However, in February UNICEF told the Post that it had filed submissions with the relevant UN human rights bodies, “highlighting areas where further work is needed to ensure all Palestinian children are provided with the necessary conditions to reach their full potential.”

Summarizing its position on the issue, UNICEF told the Post that, “Children are disproportionately affected by armed conflict in Israel and the State of Palestine. UNICEF advocates with all parties to put the interests of children first.”

“This involves advocating with Palestinian authorities on shortcomings, making clear that no child should be enlisted to violence, and advocating with Israel to make sure children are not targeted by violence. In the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict Bulletin for 2018, which can be found on UNICEF’s website, the UN documents verified incidents by all sides,” said UNICEF.

UNICEF added, “For example, in this report three cases of recruitment and use of Palestinian children in the conflict are included,” and an even-handed critique of both the Israeli and Palestinian side (even naming specific groups which are recruiting Palestinian minors) were part of UNICEF’s contribution to a 2018 report by the UN Secretary-General.

Still, even in February, UNICEF did not explain why it only criticized Hamas and PIJ, without touching on the PA.

Most of the UNICEF report focused on Palestinian minors killed by Israel either as part of the Gaza border confrontations of 2018-2019 – also known as the Great March of Return – or in the West Bank and east Jerusalem in connection with protests or riots.

The report did also note instances in which Israelis were killed or harmed by Palestinians, including noting that some of the Palestinian minors who were killed were shot while trying to stab IDF soldiers.

Regarding detention of Palestinian children for suspected crimes, the report said that approximately 198 children were being held in detention per month in 2019.

This compared to 343, 312 and 271 per month on average in 2018, 2017 and 2016, showing a recent gradual trend of lower detention rates.

The IDF Spokesman told the Post that rates of arrests and indictments for public disorder in 2020, the year of the coronavirus wave, are down from the standard average, though no separate details were given regarding minors.

The last time fewer Palestinian minors were detained was in 2014 when the average was 188 per month.

However, the report lambastes Israel for a wide range of “ill-treatments and violations of due process.”

The issues UNICEF criticized Israel for varied from threatening minors during interrogation to rough physical treatment during arrest to arresting minors at night.

While some of the alleged actions, if true, would be illegal, others, such as night arrests are controversial, but are not illegal per se and the IDF says the tactic saves lives as compared to arrests in the middle of the day.

UNICEF did not respond to a request to clarify its basis for declaring certain actions as “ill treatment” versus “violations of due process.”