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Briefing note regarding De-Palestinization of education in occupied East Jerusalem (February 2014)

As a consequence of the illegal Israeli annexation of occupied East Jerusalem, Palestinians there are subject to Israeli law. East Jerusalem children are entitled to free public education from the age of 5 to 18, in accordance with the Israeli 1949 Compulsory Education Law.

Most Palestinian children in occupied East Jerusalem are unable to fully exercise their right to education due to a number of discriminatory Israeli policies which have been documented by local and international humanitarian organizations, among them: systematic underfunding of the schools, denial of permits for construction/development of school facilities and the lack of qualified teachers resulting from Israel's closure of East Jerusalem for West Bank Palestinians.

Also documented are fragmentation of the education sector in East Jerusalem, which is characterized by multiple providers, with little coordination and wide discrepancies in the quality of education offered by Israeli public (municipal) schools, private schools (operated by both Israeli-recognized and unrecognized providers), UNRWA schools and Palestinian (Waqf/MoEHE) schools.

This brief focuses on the Israeli policy of De-Palestinization of education in East Jerusalem, which – in addition to the above – undermines the right to education of Palestinian children. **Effective protective responses to this policy are a matter of urgency in light of a new measure adopted by Israel in the academic year of 2013/14, i.e., pressure on East Jerusalem schools to adopt the Israeli curriculum and matriculation exams (Bagrut).**

De-Palestinization of Palestinian education

Background

- Since 1967, Israel, as occupying power, has pursued a policy of neglect of local educational institutions that operated in East Jerusalem prior to the occupation and annexation, and of preventing development of new Palestinian-operated schools. In parallel, **Israel has installed its own educational system in the occupied city with the intention to replace local institutions**, by establishing public schools operated by its Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education, and by promoting these schools as an educational alternative. As a result of this policy, approximately half of Palestinian children attend Israeli municipal schools.
- In the above context, Israel attempted already soon after the occupation to introduce the Israeli curriculum and text books in East Jerusalem schools. In the early 1970s, Palestinian students and teachers went on strike, demanding that the Jordanian curriculum be preserved, and parents refused to enroll their children in Israeli public schools. As a result, the Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem

agreed in 1974 to accept both, the previous Jordanian curriculum and the Israeli one in East Jerusalem schools. Palestinian educational institutions continued rejecting the Israeli curriculum.

- By 1980, most Palestinian schools in the city were teaching the Jordanian curriculum. Text books had to be submitted to the Israeli authorities for review, and **texts dealing with the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the geography of the Middle East were censored.**¹
- In 1994, the Palestinian Authority began to develop a Palestinian curriculum to replace the Jordanian one. Pursuant to the Oslo agreements, **all East Jerusalem schools, including Israeli municipal schools, adopted the Palestinian curriculum and text books in 2000.**

Renewal of the policy of De-Palestinization

- By 2011, the **Israeli Ministry of Education had made changes in the Palestinian textbooks.** The textbooks were stripped of some of their factual content. Palestinian identity and culture, terminology relating to the occupation, Israeli settlements and the Palestinian intifada, reference of Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and information about the Islamic religion and Palestinian geography and history were removed from the new Israeli-revised textbooks.
- On 7 March 2011, all recognized Palestinian private schools in East Jerusalem were informed that they are **required to obtain schoolbooks for the academic year of 2011-2012 only from the Israeli municipality’s education department. The municipality also began distribution of the censored books to all schools.** As in the past, this Israeli measure was met by protest from Palestinian students, teachers and parents.
- At present, the **censored books are used in Israeli public schools,** while many Palestinian private and Waqf/MoEHE school continue to use the text books provided by the PA. **Israeli authorities impose pressure on these schools to use the censored books** by threatening to withdraw/withhold recognition, permits and/or funding.

Academic year 2013/14: imposition of the Israeli curriculum and matriculation exams

The Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem and Ministry of Education selected **5 East Jerusalem schools which are to apply the Israeli curriculum already this year.** The five schools selected are public schools operated by the municipality which had been teaching the 2011 Israeli-censored Palestinian curriculum. The Israeli curriculum is to be applied to the lower (pre-secondary) grades.

Name of school	Location	Grades	# of Students
Ibn Rashied school	Sur Bahir	7,8,9	142
Sur Bahir elementary boys school	Sur Bahir	2,5	35
Abdullah Ibn Al-Hussein school	Sheik Jarrah	7	11
Ibn Khaldoun school	Beit Hanina		0
Sur Bahir elementary girls school	Sur Bahir		0

In practice, the Israeli curriculum has been taught this year in three of these schools only, as the two other schools did not receive students in the selected grades. In addition, **several school principals have been informed by the head of the Municipality’s East Jerusalem education department that the Israeli curriculum will be made compulsory for all municipal schools.**

¹ A S Cheshin, B Hutman and A Melamed, *Separate and Unequal: The Inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 101-105.

Implications and consequences of the Israeli policy

At present, already half of East Jerusalem Palestinian children learn from the 2011 Israeli censored text books in Israeli public schools. Imposition of the Israeli curriculum on East Jerusalem municipal (and potentially also Palestinian private) schools means that **children--part of the occupied Palestinian population--will be exposed to the same Israeli system of education that has undermined the right to education of Palestinian citizens for decades.**

Israel's system of "Arab education" has been characterized as a system where:

"The Ministry of Education retains centralized control over the form and substance of the curriculum for Arab schools, with few Arab educators wielding decision-making authority. The State Education Law sets educational objectives for state schools that emphasize Jewish history and culture."

http://adalah.org/upfiles/2011/Adalah_The_Inequality_Report_March_2011.pdf

A 2011 study of Israeli Arabic-language school books also revealed that:

- In math books for 8-15-year-olds there are at least 7,532 mistakes; in three geography and history books there are 3,939 mistakes. Hundreds of mistakes were also found in textbooks for the study of the Arabic language, including mistakes in syntax and grammar, and the use of transliterated Hebrew instead of the appropriate Arabic terms;
- The procedure for approving textbooks for Arab schools is flawed, and is damaging - both educationally and culturally - to Arab students;
- Contents of the textbooks undermine Palestinian students' cultural and national identities, for example by using transliterated Hebrew names of geographic sites, or by stating that Jews and non-Jews live in the Galilee, without mentioning the word "Arab" or "Palestinian. History textbooks ignore the presence of the Arab-Palestinian people in Israel and stress the Promised Land of the Jewish people: "There is a process of de-Palestinization, instilling of the Zionist narrative and minimizing of Arab culture."

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-s-textbooks-in-arabic-are-full-of-mistakes-study-finds-1.360617>

Imposition of the Israeli curriculum on East Jerusalem schools also means that children will graduate from high school based on the Israeli matriculation exam (Bagrut), rather than the Palestinian Tawjihi exam. Palestinian children,

- will have to pass Bagrut exams in compulsory subjects such as history of the Jewish people and the Israeli state;
- may forgo opportunities for higher education and employment in Arab countries (although Israeli matriculation exams are formally accepted by the PA and in Jordan and Egypt).

Under International law,

Israel's policy of De-Palestinization of education in occupied East Jerusalem is a violation of IHL, part of the illegal annexation of occupied territory which has deprived East Jerusalem Palestinians of the protections of the Fourth Geneva Convention. By undermining the work of local educational

institutions and by imposing its own educational institutions, curriculum and text books, which do not benefit – and are even rejected by - the occupied Palestinian population, Israel violates in particular Article 47 of the Convention.

Israel, with its policy of De-Palestinization of education in occupied East Jerusalem, also violates its obligations under international human rights law, in particular its obligation to respect, protect and promote:

The right of East Jerusalem children to education which is directed to:

- the full development of their personality, dignity and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (CESCR, Article 13);
- developing respect of their Palestinian cultural identity, language and national values (CRC, Article 29)

The right of East Jerusalem children to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek and receive information about their country and their history, culture and identity as Palestinians (CRC, Article 13).

Israel's policy of De-Palestinization of education is to be seen in the broader context of Israeli repression of Palestinian freedom of expression and assembly in occupied East Jerusalem. Israeli law prescribes sanctions for boycotts and Nakba commemorations. Israeli authorities regularly stifle public conferences and cultural events, tolerate violence by settlers and police, and have instigated a climate of fear through (threats of) summons and fines against Palestinian organizers, hosts and suppliers. At least 31 Palestinian institutions have been ordered closed since 2001 under the pretexts of security and affiliation with the PA. Many Palestinian institutions and associations have relocated from occupied East Jerusalem due to fear of Israeli persecution.

Humanitarian impact: Israel's policy of De-Palestinization of education in East Jerusalem, including the undermining of local educational institutions and the imposition of its own educational institutions, curriculum and text books, contributes to the low quality of education available for Palestinian children.

Recommended protective responses:

- Diplomatic interventions with Israel: ensure that Israel abstains from all further efforts to impose its own curriculum and censored text books in East Jerusalem schools, provides required permits and funds for the improvement of educational facilities, applies the original Palestinian curriculum and text books in its municipal schools for Palestinian children and allows their unhindered use by private Palestinian schools;
- Raise awareness and advocate for ending Israel's policy of De-Palestinization of education in East Jerusalem among the international donors, aid providers and the public;
- Support East Jerusalem schools, parents and students in their efforts to protect the Palestinian education system and improve the quality of education delivered to the children.