

LABOUR  
FRIENDS  
*of* ISRAEL  
*Working towards a  
two state solution*

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13<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Dear James

I write to you with regard to the Inception Report and the Interim Report into Palestinian Authority textbooks carried out by the Georg Eckert Institute on behalf of the British government and European Union.

Following a review of the Inception Report and a presentation on the Interim Report, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) has raised some serious concerns about the quality of the work undertaken by the GEI:

First, the presentation of the EU's Interim Report on the Palestinian curriculum praises the Israel's Jerusalem Municipality Arabic textbooks, which are presented by the GEI researchers as PA textbooks. In reality, specific examples which are singled out for praise by the researchers are not contained in PA textbooks, but those used by pupils in the Jerusalem Municipality's Arabic-language schools. If this is not an error, I'd be grateful for an explanation as to what interest the British government and EU have in studying textbooks which are funded by Israeli taxpayers and which are not used in PA schools?

Second, only 24% (21 out of 85 books researched) covered in the grade 8-10 Interim Report are currently taught in the 2019-20 school year - 76% of the researched textbooks are no longer taught or used in PA schools.

Third, the Inception Report contained poor comprehension of Arabic, missing terminology and factual inaccuracies. It contained basic Arabic translation errors, left out key words, showed a lack of familiarity with Palestinian culture, and quoted references to research that does not actually exist.

If accurate, IMPACT-se's allegations seriously undermine the credibility of the textbook review and call into question its utility as a means to deal with the issue of incitement to violence in the PA curriculum. Given that the UK funded the Inception Report in its entirety and has contributed to the cost of the Interim Report, I would ask that you seek an urgent and detailed response to these claims, which IMPACT-se has laid out in considerable detail (please see the two attached documents).

Additionally, I also understand that the EU is now suggesting that "the EU has not used the inception report funded by the UK as the basis of the EU funded study". I would therefore also ask that you seek an explanation from the GEI as to why the report it produced (which was commissioned by

your department and funded by British taxpayers) has apparently proved to be of no use to the full review. Perhaps you could also explain what utility – if any – the inception report has, if, indeed, it's not being used to inform the GEI's work.

I am also deeply concerned about the issue of transparency. I note that the EU is suggesting that the Interim Report should not be published.

As you will recall, Labour Friends of Israel first raised concerns about the new PA curriculum in September 2017. Those concerns were initially dismissed by ministers, before DfID promised a review in spring 2018. Three months later, the government announced that it wanted an independent, international review. Despite repeated assurances by ministers, that review was not completed by September 2019 and it is still awaited.

You have now suggested that, while you would like to see the review published, it is the property of the EU. Given that ministers were well aware at the time they opted for an international review that Britain was leaving the EU, I find the decision to opt for a process over which the UK would effectively have no control or ownership a curious one.

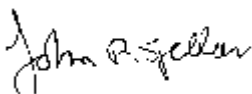
As you are aware from the Westminster Hall debate in March, there is a great deal of cross-party parliamentary interest in this topic. I would appreciate your clarification, therefore, on how – if the EU refuses permission to publish the review – the government intends to use the review to respond to those concerns and allow an informed debate on the future of British aid which, as your predecessors have accepted, is paying the salaries of teachers who are “involved in the implementation process” for the curriculum.

As you are also aware, the Memorandum of Understanding between the British government and the PA explicitly requires that the PA must take action against “incitement to violence, including addressing allegations of incitement in the educational curriculum”. This is a commitment the PA has entered into every year since 2016 while, at the same time, making no substantive changes to a curriculum which, as IMPACT-se has suggested, “exerts pressure over young Palestinians to acts of violence in a more extensive and sophisticated manner” and is “more radical than ever, purposefully and strategically encouraging Palestinian children to sacrifice themselves to martyrdom”.

Given that the issue of the curriculum was first raised with ministers nearly three years ago, I believe it is imperative that we now attempt to move this process forward. I would, therefore, very much appreciate a meeting my fellow LFI parliamentary officers with you to discuss my concerns in greater detail.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



**Rt. Hon. John Spellar MP**  
**Vice-chair, Labour Friends of Israel**