



Department
for International
Development



Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP
Minister of State

Our ref

191878

18 February 2019

Dear Colleague,

The 10 Minute Rule Bill, introduced by the Rt Hon Dame Louise Ellman MP, is scheduled for a vote on Friday 8 March. This Bill proposes to prohibit UK aid to Palestinian Authority (PA) operated schools that do not embody the values of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). We understand from the Bill's summary that, if passed, this Bill would require the Secretary of State to make an annual report on the extent to which PA-operated schools embodied UNESCO values, with aid being withheld if the PA were judged to fall short.

The Government is unable to support this Bill. However, we do take the promotion of peace and tolerance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories extremely seriously, and we welcome scrutiny from parliamentarians on this important topic. We are not supporting the Bill because we already have an approach in place to hold the PA to account for the promotion of peace and tolerance in the Palestinian education system. This approach includes an annual dialogue with the PA, which allows the UK to assess the extent to which the PA continues to adhere to a number of principles, including the principle of non-violence. I am writing to outline this approach, and to inform you of additional actions we have taken to address material in Palestinian textbooks.

We understand that this Bill was introduced partly in response to allegations that the Palestinian curriculum contains incitement to violence. Let me be absolutely clear: anti-Semitism, violence and hate have no place in society, let alone in a school curriculum. The Government is deeply concerned by some of the content in the Palestinian textbooks. I have personally raised this with the PA at a senior level, most recently on 21 January with the Minister for Education Sabri Saidam.

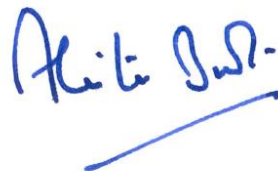
I have committed to conducting an independent review into allegations of incitement in textbooks, to be published by September 2019. My officials are close to finalising discussions with potential international partners about undertaking the textbook review as a joint endeavour, to maximise its credibility and impact. In parallel with these negotiations, officials have already begun work on designing the review to ensure that it takes place in a timely and methodologically rigorous way. The UK is taking a leading role in ensuring this process is completed by the stated deadline. We will use the textbook review as the basis for further discussions with the PA. The Palestinian Minister of Education has committed to engage constructively with this review, and to listen to recommendations.

The UK Government deplores any act of violence or incitement to violence and our partnership with the PA includes a commitment from the Palestinian leadership to adhere to the principle of non-violence and to tackle language and avoid actions that could incite violence or hatred. We have an annual dialogue with the PA, which allows us to assess the PA's commitment to taking action to promote non-violence. The most recent assessment of this commitment, in May 2018, concluded that the PA continues to demonstrate a credible commitment to DFID's 'partnership principles', including the principle of non-violence, under increasingly volatile conditions. The next assessment will take place in May 2019.

UK aid to the Palestinian education sector plays an important role. In 2018, UK support to the PA enabled around 26,500 young Palestinians to get an education. UK aid to the PA is delivered through and safeguarded by the European Union Palestinian-European Socio-Economic Management Assistance Mechanism (PEGASE). It is used exclusively to pay the salaries of vetted health and education public servants, including teachers, doctors and nurses, in the West Bank.

The UK Government is committed to promoting tolerance, respect and peace in the Middle East and this is in line with our long-standing support for a negotiated two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians. We have thought carefully about how to take the most effective possible action to promote the teaching of tolerance and peace in Palestinian schools. We think it is best to follow the path outlined above, particularly given that the PA Ministry of Education is engaged in the textbook review process and that we already have a process in place to assess the PA's commitment to the principle of non-violence.

Thank you for your interest on this important issue. I will shortly invite interested colleagues to a meeting to discuss these issues further and to provide additional information about the textbook review.



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