



United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-281690

December 15, 1998

The Honorable James Saxton
The Honorable Peter Deutsch
House of Representatives

Subject: Foreign Assistance: U.S. Assistance for Elementary and Preparatory Schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Concerned that U.S. assistance funds might have been used in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to purchase textbooks with anti-Semitic and proterrorist language and sentiments, you requested that we identify all U.S. funds provided for the benefit of elementary and preparatory schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for fiscal years 1996, 1997, and 1998. At your request, we are also providing certain information on U.S. assistance for schools in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. This funding information is summarized in the enclosure.

Your concern was based on a September 1998 report entitled Palestinian Authority School Text Books, published by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace. The Center purportedly found objectionable language in textbooks published by the Palestinian Authority (PA)¹ Ministry of Education. Both the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and PA operate elementary and preparatory schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. UNRWA manages 267 schools for Palestinian children who are registered refugees.² PA manages schools for children who do not qualify for UNRWA assistance. You noted that U.S. assistance may have been provided through UNRWA, the U.S.

¹Following the signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 1993, PA was established in May 1994 to begin assuming self-governing responsibilities for the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

²A registered Palestinian refugee is a person whose normal residence was in Palestine for a minimum of 2 years preceding the 1948 Arab/Israeli conflict and who, as a result of this conflict, lost his home and means of livelihood and took refuge in one of the countries where UNRWA provides relief. Refugees within this definition and the direct descendants of such refugees are eligible for UNRWA assistance.

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Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), or private voluntary organizations.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

For fiscal years 1996-98, we estimate that U.S. assistance to UNRWA elementary and preparatory schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip totaled about \$69 million. The U.S. share of UNRWA's education budget for the West Bank and Gaza Strip accounted for \$65.2 million.³ The remainder was a USAID grant of \$3.6 million for an UNRWA program involving school construction and maintenance activities. No U.S. assistance was provided for PA schools.

U.S. assistance to UNRWA elementary and preparatory schools in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria totaled about \$61 million for fiscal years 1996-98. These funds represent the U.S. share of UNRWA's education budget and U.S. support for special funding projects under UNRWA's Peace Implementation Program.

USIA provided English language training for teachers in schools in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, but USIA funding information was not readily available. However, USIA noted that aggregate spending levels were small compared to the other funding activities.

An OPIC official told us that no OPIC funds had been made available for elementary and preparatory schools in the region during fiscal years 1996-98. Two private voluntary organizations operating in the region told us that none of their funds had been spent on activities benefitting PA elementary and preparatory schools. They were also unaware of any other private voluntary organization in the region with such programs.

Determining whether any textbooks used by UNRWA were those reviewed by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace was beyond the scope of our review. However, UNRWA documentation shows that it purchased PA textbooks as early as the 1995-96 school year. According to UNRWA, less than 2 percent of its education budget for the region was spent on textbooks in the current school year. The U.S. proportional share of these expenses was about \$791,000. We note that the conference report on the 1999 Omnibus

³U.S. contributions to UNRWA are provided through the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. U.S. regular budget contributions are not earmarked for specific purposes. Therefore, as agreed with UNRWA and State, we imputed U.S. funding for education based on the proportional contribution made to UNRWA's regular operating budget.

B-281690

directed that the Secretary of State submit a report to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees "specifying whether the content of the textbooks and curricula used by UNRWA contains anti-Semitic material" not later than 90 days after the act's enactment.⁴

AGENCY COMMENTS

In commenting on a draft of this report, UNRWA, State, USAID, and USIA officials agreed with our overall observations. They also updated some information and provided technical changes that we have incorporated, as appropriate.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To determine the levels of U.S. assistance, we obtained funding data and related documentation from UNRWA, State, and USAID. We also interviewed cognizant officials from UNRWA, State, USAID, USIA, and OPIC and two private voluntary organizations active in the Middle East.

We conducted our review from September to December 1998 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees, the Secretary of State, the Administrator of USAID, and other interested parties. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

Please contact me at (202) 512-4128 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors to this report were Michael M. ten Kate and A.H. Huntington, III.



Harold J. Johnson
Associate Director, International
Relations and Trade Issues

Enclosure

⁴H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 105-825, at 1154 (1998).

U.S. ASSISTANCE TO ELEMENTARY AND PREPARATORY SCHOOLS IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP, JORDAN, LEBANON, AND SYRIA (Fiscal Years 1996-98)

Dollars in thousands

Activity	Implementing/ U.S. funding organization	Fiscal year			Total
		1996	1997	1998	
West Bank and Gaza Strip					
School operations and administration ^a	UNRWA/State	\$21,769	\$21,138	\$22,299	\$65,200
Small-scale community infrastructure ^b	UNRWA/USAID	3,600	0	0	3,600
Subtotal for the West Bank and Gaza Strip		\$25,369	\$21,132	\$22,299	\$68,800
Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria					
School operations ^a	UNRWA/State	\$19,934	\$19,351	\$20,420	\$59,705
Peace Implementation Program ^c	UNRWA/State	770	854	0	1,624
Subtotal for Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria		\$20,704	\$20,205	\$20,420	\$61,329
Total		\$46,073	\$41,337	\$42,719	\$130,129

Legend

State - U.S. Department of State; Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
 USAID - U.S. Agency for International Development
 UNRWA - United Nations Relief and Works Agency

^aU.S. regular budget contributions are not earmarked for specific purposes. Therefore, as agreed with UNRWA and State, we imputed U.S. funding for education based on the proportional contribution made to UNRWA's regular operating budget.

^bThis program included school construction and maintenance activities.

^cThese projects were primarily school construction, equipment, maintenance, and upgrades.

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