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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on the Promotion
and Protection of Human Rights
Fifty-seventh session
Item 2 and 6 (c) of the provisional agenda

**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL
FREEDOMS, INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND
SEGREGATION, IN ALL COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO
COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES:
REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION UNDER COMMISSION ON HUMAN
RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)**

**SPECIFIC HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES: NEW PRIORITIES, IN PARTICULAR
TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM:**

**Joint written statement* submitted by Association for World Education and Association
of World Citizens, two non-governmental organizations on the roster and International
Humanist and Ethical Union, a non-governmental organization in special consultative
status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated
in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 June 2005]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting
non-governmental organization(s).

The Culture of “Jihad and Martyrdom” in Egyptian School Textbooks

1. On 18 April 2005 during the 61st session of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), a Parallel NGO Conference (Victims of Jihad: Muslims, Dhimmis, Apostates, and Women) was held, sponsored by three NGOs: Association for World Education (AWE), the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), and the Association of World Citizens (AWC).

2. The matters debated during eight hours at the conference by historians, writers, and human rights defenders are of crucial interest for human rights worldwide. The dire effects of a growing “Ideology of Jihad” is most pertinent to item 2 of the agenda, as CHR resolution 8 (XXIII) of 16 March 1967, § 2, requests “information on violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms from all available sources for the use of the Commission.” Item 6 (c) covers terrorism and a World Programme for Human Rights Education. This statement is adapted from the conference text presented by David G. Littman, historian and writer on human rights.¹

3. Wishing to provide information to the 56th session of the Sub-Commission on Human Rights on what is being taught to children in Egyptian schools about “infidels” – especially in relation to concepts like traditional Jihad and Martyrdom – the AWE widely circulated a report on Egyptian school textbooks, published by the Jerusalem Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP), titled: Jews, Christians, War and Peace in Egyptian School Textbooks,² and submitted a written statement to the 56th session of the Sub-Commission, E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/NGO/27, entitled: Jihad & Martyrdom” as taught in Egyptian primary / preparatory /secondary school text books.³

4. Founded in 1998, the CMIP has been researching the school textbooks and teachers’ guidelines of Middle Eastern countries since 2000 as a means of deciphering educational attitudes toward peace and toward the “other” in general. It has issued 11 reports on the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt – all with substantial documentation and references.⁴

5. School textbooks are one of the most crucial means by which a nation passes on to the younger generation a certain worldview, determined according to parameters set by the educational establishment. As such they open a window on to what the education system in a specific country wishes to instil in students’ minds.

Analysis of 103 Egyptian school textbooks (1999-2002)

6. The CMIP Report on Egypt surveys 103 textbooks published by the Education Ministry for use in primary, preparatory and secondary state schools, as well as 16 textbooks in preparatory and secondary schools under the supervision of Al-Azhar’s religious institute. They cover the top five grades (7-11). The majority of the books were published in 2002, and the others between 1999-2001. All the books were carefully scrutinized in accordance with UNESCO and CMIP criteria.

Egyptian school textbooks contain positive and negative aspects on the “other”

7. The conclusions drawn from Egyptian school textbooks are that the Christian West is not presented as a rival, but no adequate and objective information is given about its civilization either. On the other hand, past conflicts with the West – mainly in the context of the Crusades and of modern imperialism – are vividly described, using hostile language. Western imperialism is presented as the source of almost all the calamities that have befallen the Arab world in modern times, beginning with occupation and economic exploitation, down to the fragmentation of the Arab world and the creation of internal problems – and ending with the creation of the Palestinian problem and the support of Israel.

8. “Martyrdom,” as a result of “Jihad in the path of Allah,” is an exalted value in the Egyptian school textbooks. The books define the “martyr”, talk of his elevated position in the eyes of Allah and of his reward in heaven, and provide the students with examples of heroic martyrdom, both in Islamic and modern history, featuring various expressions of readiness for such action.

9. The image of the Jews – historically and at present – as portrayed in Egyptian school textbooks in both school systems is very negative. No Jewish individual is portrayed in positive terms, except for some key biblical figures (considered, traditionally, as “Muslims”), and...Einstein.

10. There are several positive elements in Egyptian textbooks such as the attitude regarding the Copts – implicitly related to their acceptance of the traditional *dhimmi* status – and the stress on tolerance and against religious extremism – at least in the state schools which endeavour to foster this positive attitude among students. The Coptic civilization and monuments are presented as an integral part of Egypt's history and the “friendly relations” of the Copts with early Muslims are emphasized, as well as their participation in Egypt's national struggle. The Copts are depicted as an integral part of the Egyptian nation. In contrast, the Al-Azhar textbooks emphasize this aspect much less, but without negative references to Copts.⁵ This is the theory, but the current reality is very different.⁶

Special status of Egypt should be an example for human rights education

11. Egypt's status within the Arab world is unique. It is in a position to set an example for all other Arab countries in the direction of peace and stability in the region. Some of the findings in the textbooks are disappointing, and others are most shocking. In various areas these manuals have failed to meet the recommended UNESCO standard on education that would have been expected from a country in such a special position of influence within UNESCO, in the Middle East, and worldwide. School teaching on “jihad and martyrdom” and attitudes toward the “other” – whether they be “protected” *dhimmi* Jews or Christians, or other infidels – that are found in these school textbooks (state or Al-Azhar) is in contradiction with UNESCO standards and the International Bill of Human Rights to which Egypt is a party, having long since ratified these international instruments.

Arab-Muslim voices speak out against a Jihad Ideology and appeal for sweeping reforms

12. However, there are voices in the Arab world that speak out increasingly against such inflexible jihadist attitudes. On July 10, 2004 an Egyptian weekly published a strong criticism

by Sayyed Al-Qimni, a progressive writer at Cairo University and lecturer on the sociology of religion. He stated that Al-Azhar University's curricula encourage extremism and terror, giving many examples to prove his point, including what he called the disgusting attitude toward *dhimmis*, considered as infidels: "What kind of thinking are we teaching our next generation, that it has the right to attack other countries in order to convert them to Islam?"⁷ (For other examples, see E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/NGO/3 and NGO/4)

Second decade of UN human rights education (2005-2014) should condemn the teaching of hate

13. At the start of a second UN decade for human rights education, it would be timely for UN bodies to speak out firmly in regard to human rights educational attitudes in general, and toward peace and the "other"; and also to condemn any teaching of "Jihad and Martyrdom," especially as it relates to the beheading of non-Muslim "infidels" or of "apostates." The AWE has reiterated many times that "those committing such barbaric acts in the name of Islam gravely blemish its reputation in the eyes of the world," and called on all UN bodies to act on this grave matter.

14. Now is the time to examine systematically the school textbooks used by all states members of the United Nations, and especially the 53 members of the current CHR and the future Council of HR.

15. So long as the CHR and its Sub-Commission, and other human rights bodies, particularly UNESCO, do not address this blatant misuse of school textbooks in Egypt there will be little hope of attaining peace and reconciliation throughout the world among peoples and religions. Ideally, all such systems of teaching hate should give way to a general process of democratization and respect for human rights and all ethnic and religious minorities – and this does not mean just voting in elections.

Postscriptum:

Accusations of blasphemy and "defamation of Islam" at the 56th session of the Sub-Commission

16. In a deeply worrying turn of events at the meeting of the 56th session of the Sub-Commission in August 2004, the inclusion in AWE's written statement of a few vivid examples from Al-Azhar textbooks that give details on the beheading of infidels was considered blasphemous by the Sudanese delegate.⁸ Yet jihadists and Islamic scholars are fully aware that beheading the infidel was – and often still is – associated by Islamic jurists with a warlike jihad tactic. The classic text is from al-Mawardi, the renowned eleventh century Shafi'i jurist of Baghdad, considered "the most judicious of Qadis."⁹

17. This was the tragic fate of Daniel Pearl in Pakistan (March 2002), beheaded in a consecrated Jihad-war tactic that soon became normal in Iraq, where about 200 foreigners were abducted as hostages in 2004. This practise continues into 2005. Thirty of the civilian hostages were slaughtered, twenty being ritually beheading by Abu Musab al-Zarkawi, while his hooded adepts sanctified this horror by shouting joyfully into the camera, "Allah-u Akhbar!"

18. Pakistan's member of the Sub-Commission even complained on a "point of order," asking Chairman Soli Sorabjee (India) to prevent AWE's oral statement on the subject. And, after it was delivered, Pakistan's representative delivered an indignant reply (10 August 2004), condemning AWE's written statement "NGO/27", which he called a "defamation of Islam." He stated that: "*Islam was a religion of peace grouping 1.5 billion people in the world, and it was unacceptable that this religion should be thus despised.*" He announced that his government would take steps to protect UN organs such as the Sub-Commission from being thus abused.¹⁰

19. This accusation, a secular form of *fatwa*, was repeated by Pakistan's representative three days later in an unusual concluding statement during the final meeting when he then spoke on behalf of 56 Muslim States (and the PA), comprising all the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

20. We find this failure to distinguish between the reporting of facts – with documentary evidence – and the ongoing accusation of "defamation of Islam" deeply troubling, and we urge all members of the Sub-Commission not to be deflected from their responsibilities by fear of receiving calumnious criticism.

Notes

1. For a fuller documentation, see the article by David G. Littman, "A Culture of Hate Based on 'Jihad and Martyrdom': Saudi Arabian and Egyptian Schoolbooks Today," *Midstream* (New York), March/April 2005, pp. 6-11. The full texts of the presentations made at the conference can be found at www.iheu.org/UNCHR2005; and the text used by Littman there is at: www.iheu.org/modules/bfsection/article.php?articleid=387

2. CMIP, Jews, Christians, War and Peace in Egyptian School Textbooks. Compiled, trans. & ed. by Dr. Arnon Groiss. New York & Jerusalem: CMIP, March 2004, chapter 11, pp. 146-56. See Syrian Sheikh Abu Hamza Al-Masri's detailed views on 'Martyrdom and the Love of Death,' in his Friday sermon delivered at Finsbury Park Mosque (London) on 23 April 2004, in which he announced that: "The Ideology of Martyrdom is spreading now in our [Islamic] Nation." Excerpts in English from MEMRI: Special Dispatch Series; 762, 12 Aug. 2004: <http://memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?Page=archives&ID=SP76204>

3. See: The UN & the Grave Worldwide Cultural Clash (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/NGO/25*); and Muslim Brotherhood / Hamas / Hezbollah / Al-Qaeda: Terror Legacy of "Jihadist-Martyrdom-Bombings" (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/NGO/26) by the WUPJ. In this context, on 30 Dec. 2002, Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi posted an appeal to establish a Jihad army in Iraq: The enemies of Iraq crave life, while Muslims crave martyrdom. He declared there: "The martyrdom operations that shock can ensure that horror is sowed in the [enemies'] hearts, and horror is one of the causes of defeat." (Arabic Hamas website on 30 Dec. 2002: www.palestine-info.info/arabic/palestoday/readers/articles/rantese/30-12-2002, and on two other Arabic sources. English trans. by MEMRI: Special Dispatch Series – N° 457, Jan. 9, 2003; See E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/NGO/25*, containing an Urgent Appeal on this to the Secretary-General, Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chairman, UNCHR.

4. Report (March 2004) pp. 172. Further information in introductions of these books and on CMIP's website: www.edume.org

5. CMIP Report on Egypt, *Ibid. See Executive summary, p. 8, and Conclusion ("Peace and Tolerance") p.163.*

6. AWE statement: E/CN.4/2004/NGO/90: Discrimination in the Egyptian criminal justice system: 'State Security'/'States of Emergency'/'Military Tribunals': discrimination against Copts involving impunity in massacre of 21 Copts at Al-Khosheh in 2000; brutal attack on Al-Girza, Nov. 2004; and E/CN.4/2001/NGO/49, with "Opinion" (E/CN.4/2000/4/Add. 1, pp. 52-55).

7. *Roz Al-Youssef* (Egypt), July 10, 2004. English trans. in MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series – No. 790, September 27, 2004: <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP79004>.

8. *So he repeated aloud to AWE's representative in Room XVII (plenum) with State and NGO representatives present.*

9. *The Laws of Islamic Governance [al-Ahkam as-Sultanivvah]* by [Abu'l-Hasan] al-Mawardi. English translation by Asadullah Yate, London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., 1996. Dr. Yate, a Cambridge University scholar and a Muslim, gives the full koranic source (p.76): "When you encounter those who deny [the Truth] then strike [their] necks." (Koran 47:4).

10. UN meetings coverage, HR/SC/04/19, p. 8.

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