



**A Spectrum of Light in the
Middle East**

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In this Newsletter:

- Update on The Prism Group
- Women of the Middle East (Fact Sheet update)
- Palestinian Children: What are they taught (Prism Report)
- The Prism Group Website

Update on The Prism Group

The Prism Group's activities continue to be centered on the rights of minorities and the weak in the Middle East. Maintaining this focus was particularly difficult this month, as the level of violence rose once again. While other organizations will concentrate on suicide bombings, the roadmap, the negotiations, and continued instability in Iraq, The Prism Group has decided to remain focused on those who suffer outside the spectrum.

Women, children, minorities...they are all-too-often the silent victims of the conflict. What we have learned is that they are often the victims of their own governments. This month, one of our fact sheets focused on how women are treated throughout the Middle East. What we found...was that there is much to be improved and a long road ahead.

In response to questions from newsletter subscribers, our research teams were also busy delving deeper into the issue of Palestinian treatment of children. Our first [fact sheet](#) on this topic was written several months ago, and further concerns were raised in our [fact sheet](#) about UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian Authority. Our research on how Palestinian children are being educated has unearthed more disturbing evidence. We've given you a preview of our [latest in-depth report](#) in this newsletter.

Finally, as we publish this newsletter, our teams are busy investigating further issues of concern and working to bring these issues to the attention of key individuals, organizations, and government officials in Europe, the US and the Middle East.

Women of the Middle East

The Prism Group has researched the status of women throughout the Middle East, and presents its findings in its [latest fact sheet](#).

At the beginning of the 21st century, citizens of western, democratic societies take the rights of women for granted. However, in the Middle East many women still face insurmountable cultural hurdles.

Palestinian Children: What are they taught?

The best hope for a prolonged peace in the region remains in a new generation, which has been educated towards peace and co-existence as opposed to hatred and intolerance.

The Prism Group has published an [extensive survey](#) of recent academic studies which analyze the extent to which textbooks in Palestinian schools can be considered part of a "peace curriculum", or the extent to which they in fact exacerbate tensions and encourage phenomena such as those reported in our last newsletter, where 68% of 1,000 children surveyed by the Gaza Program for Psychotherapy thought that a child could solve her problems and those of society by carrying out a suicide bombing.

One of the most recent studies was released by the Israel / Palestinian Center for Research and Information (IPCRI). This is a non-governmental organization, comprising both Israelis and Palestinians. Its conclusions summarize on peace and tolerance that "these textbooks fail to apply these principles and concepts [of religious tolerance] to include Jews"

The report goes on to detail:

- ❖ failings in the teaching of civil society and cultural literacy.
- ❖ that Jews are "inadequately and inappropriately represented", when detailing historical events of the region.
- ❖ problems in teaching religious identity, where the textbooks "seem to ignore their existence (of Jewish religious places) or their importance to Jews and the State of Israel."
- ❖ with regard to modern history, in some contexts, Jews "are negatively represented."

What is significant is the consistency of these findings with the claims of the Israeli army liaison unit for the Palestinian Territories, relating to a study it conducted of 11 books released in September 2002 by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. (The books covered grades 3 – 8.)

As the academic school year of 2002-2003 ends and preparations begin for another school year in September 2003, the evidence strongly suggests that large elements of the Palestinian school system, a system that receives vast overseas help from public taxpayers money, is still swirling in an atmosphere of hatred. Further, new materials of dubious content are continuing to enter the curriculum, sponsored by UNRWA and the Palestinian Ministry Of Education. The failure to organize school materials focusing on positive aspects of promoting peace and understanding, rather than hatred and the glorification of violence, leaves children of all sides in a more precarious position than ever.

Read The Prism Group's in-depth report entitled '[Palestinian Children: what are they taught](#)', at our [website](#).

The Prism Group Website

The Prism Group's website is updated regularly to focus on new points of interest. If you haven't had a chance to see our site recently, why not take a moment now and surf to: www.theprismgroup.org.

We also hope that you will alert others to the important issues discussed on our site. Download the fact sheets and send them to friends and colleagues. Write us at info@theprismgroup.org with other ideas that you think should be explored and exposed. Share this newsletter with your friends, and encourage them to subscribe by sending an email to newsletter@theprismgroup.org.

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