

Canadian corporation abets Israel's war crimes with public funds

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Nora Barrows-Friedman Activism and BDS Beat 5 October 2022

Israel's construction of settlements and related infrastructure in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is a war crime.

Markus Mainka ImageBroker

The United Nations must include a Canadian company in its database of businesses that profit from Israel's illegal settlement industry, according to the Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq and Just Peace Advocates, a Canadian organization.

WSP Global Inc., cited by the two groups, is headquartered in Montreal. It is an engineering, infrastructure and energy contractor.

The Canadian Public Pension Investment Board is a major shareholder in the corporation.

WSP is helping Israel plan the Jerusalem Light Rail system

Israel's construction of settlements and related infrastructure in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is a war crime.

Supported by more than 100 human rights organizations and dozens of prominent activists, scholars and legal experts, Al-Haq and Just Peace Advocates submitted a report on WSP's Israel operations to the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk in mid-September.

They called for WSP to be included in the 2020 UN database of businesses operating in illegal Israeli settlements.

Today, John Dugard, @MichaelLynk5 and @rfalk13 (former UN Special Rapporteurs) & former MP @LibbyDavies endorsed a report submitted by @alhaq_org & @AdvocatesJust to @UN_HRC to add @wsp to UN database for its complicity with Israel's annexing Jerusalem Light Rail. #Mindthegap pic.twitter.com/QGqrj0mFNX

— Just Peace Advocates (@AdvocatesJust) September 15, 2022

"WSP has been contracted to plan the management, development and electrifying of the light rail, including the Red and Green line which is connecting illegal Israeli settlements to East Jerusalem," Kathryn Ravey, a legal researcher at Al-Haq, told The Electronic Intifada.

“They’re solely responsible for the development and facilitation of that project,” she added.

“And they’re also getting funds for the managing of this as well, which will see increased profits as time goes on with the servicing of the rail line.”

Ravey explained that WSP is helping to finance Israel’s war crime of population transfer of Israeli citizens to illegal settlements, a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as the UN’s guiding principles on business and human rights.

“The creation of the Jerusalem Light Rail has appropriated natural resources as well as the properties of Palestinians, which violates their human rights of a standard of living, the right to own property, the right to own land and other violations of basic rights that Israel has contributed to,” Ravey said.

Spiked contracts

For years, Israel’s light rail extension plans have been dogged by international protests and significant boycott victories.

In 2015, the French multinational infrastructure firm Veolia spiked its rail contracts with the Israeli government, selling off its stakes to local Israeli investors despite the fact that the government wanted an experienced international operator to be involved.

In May 2019, French train manufacturer Alstom dropped plans to bid on the light rail extension after sustained campaigns from trade unions and activists.

Earlier that month, The Electronic Intifada broke the news that Canadian firm Bombardier had dumped its tramway contract bids, along with Australia’s Macquarie and Germany’s Siemens.

More recently, Spain’s CAF has also been involved in planning the extension of the rail project, but has faced mounting protests across Spain and the UK.

“Quite shocking”

Ravey explained that as the United Nations reviews and analyzes their WSP submission, Al-Haq “is mostly trying to push for and advocate for annual and comprehensive updates to the database, which they are mandated to do.”

She said it is “quite shocking” that the UN has not yet updated the database, “as it is such a potentially powerful mechanism for international accountability of the private sector.”

The group is also lobbying the Canadian government to take action to hold its corporations and tax dollars accountable to international law, Ravey added.

Karen Rodman, director of Just Peace Advocates, told The Electronic Intifada that Canadians are mobilizing to support the submission through petitions and letter-writing campaigns, as well as demanding responsibility inside stakeholder meetings.

The Canadian public pension funds are invested in 11 companies listed by the United Nations in its database of businesses complicit in Israel's war crimes, according to research by Just Peace Advocates.

The investments made by the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board involve \$524 million of equity holdings as of this year, the group says.

Rodman explained that people are angry that their pension funds are being used to commit harm against Palestinians.

"Whether you're in Canada or in other places – because WSP is a transnational company with [infrastructure] contracts in local and provincial areas – it's important to raise the issue" of the Jerusalem light rail system with the company, she said.

Israeli police training

Meanwhile, another campaign against public funds being used to help Israel harm Palestinians is underway in Quebec.

The BDS-Quebec coalition is demanding that the province's pension fund, La Caisse de Dépôt et Placement du Québec (CDPQ), sever ties with Policy Ltd, which runs an Israeli police training center with G1 Secure Systems, formerly known as G4S Israel.

G4S, one of the largest private security corporations in the world, sold its Israeli subsidiary to the Israeli private equity firm FIMI for more than \$100 million in 2016.

In conjunction with FIMI, G1 runs Policy and provides services to infrastructure and real estate group Shikun & Binui in settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Last year, the CDPQ "became financially associated with Policy after it became a major shareholder in Allied Universal, a multinational private security company, which had just acquired G4S," according to Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East.

G1 is a 25 percent shareholder in Policy.

.@bdsquebec calls on @LaCDPQ, the Québec pension fund, to divest from @AlliedUniversal for its involvement in operating Policy, a training facility for apartheid Israel's notoriously brutal police forces. <https://t.co/4hBkYSyFGw>
[pic.twitter.com/xRXWiCJtEG](https://t.co/4hBkYSyFGw)

— BDS movement (@BDSmovement) September 21, 2022

“Following a series of meetings with the CDPQ, BDS-Quebec noted serious shortcomings in the social supervision of the CDPQ’s investments,” Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East said.

The pension funds are forcing people in Quebec to be “involved in house raids and imprisonment without trial,” stated Dyala Hamzah, a member of BDS-Quebec.

“Quebecers have always been pacifists, there is no way they would support such violence financially. I can’t believe I’m supporting this regime against my will,” she added.

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