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Bruno Jäntti is the founder of ICAHD Finland, the Finnish branch of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions.

Finland seeks to hide arms trade with Israel

Even as criticism increases regarding Finnish arms trade with Israel, the government has decided both to pursue the arms trade with Israel in the coming months and, in a bold and controversial new manoeuvre, try to pass a law that would make the Finnish-Israeli arms trade a state secret, writes Bruno Jäntti.

IN THE midst of an ongoing unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) bid in which both of the two finalists are Israeli weapons companies, the Finnish government is pushing forward a bill that would make the details of the Finnish-Israeli arms trade a state secret. The Defence Committee has finished processing the bill and, in all probability, it will pass into law when voted on in the Parliament. Besides support from the government, a clear majority of the Defence Committee members also favours the bill.

THIS is the first time that Finland has sought an agreement on information protection with another state with an exclusively military and security focus. The title of the agreement is: "Agreement on Mutual Protection of Classified Information Between the Government of the Republic of Finland and the Government of the State of Israel through the Israeli Ministry of Defence". The first and arguably the most relevant article of the agreement reads as follows: "The purpose of this Agreement is to protect Classified Information and/or Classified Material transmitted or exchanged between the Parties in connection with research, procurement or manufacturing in the field of defence or security or in connection with defence or security re-

lated matters or projects by or for the defence or security administrations of the Parties, be it between government entities or private organizations, or arising or produced within the context of an activity falling within the scope of application of this Agreement."

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THE LEGAL move by the Finnish authorities is their latest course of action in a nationwide debate on the future of

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the arms trade between Finland and Israel. The total value of the Finnish-Israeli arms trade is close to 200 million euros.

MOST of the military trade between the two countries has been conducted since the beginning of the Second Intifada in September 2000. Since then, Israel has killed 6,500 Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territo-

ries, including almost 1,500 children. A great many of these attacks, including illegal Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians, have been carried out using equipment provided by Finland's trading partners in Israel's private military sector.

FINLAND has conducted and continues to conduct large-scale trade with Israeli weapons and military technology manufacturers that consciously sell equipment to be used in blatant human-rights violations. Indeed, they use their intimate ties and close cooperation with the Israeli military as an openly stated selling point in the international military market.

THE FACT that Finland is trading arms with a serious violator of international law, as well as patronising private Israeli weapons companies, has perhaps elicited more domestic criticism than Finland's arms trade with any other state.

MORE THAN 250 Finnish dignitaries from the arts, sciences and politics signed a petition criticising the mil-

itary trade between Israel and Finland. Among those calling for an immediate discontinuation of all forms of military trade with Israel are foreign minister **Erkki Tuomioja**, world-renowned expert on international law **Martti Koskeniemi** and distinguished professor at the University of Helsinki, forensic dentist **Helena Ranta**. They are joined by Finnish MEPs and MPs, a number of Finlandia Prize winners, stage and film directors, actors, writers, scholars and more than 40 university professors.

ON TOP of that, Helsingin Sanomat, Taloussanomat and other major Finnish media outlets have covered the various aspects of the Finnish-Israeli weapons trade critically. The trade has had very little, if any, support in the Finnish mainstream media.

ICAHD Finland (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions), the organisation behind the petition, specifically approached selected dignitaries who represent a wide spectrum of fields of expertise and enjoy exceptional recognition in their professional or artistic careers. They were requested to issue a public statement in support of the petition and thus clarify why they are calling for an immediate cessation of all form of mili-

tary trade between the two states.

INTERNATIONALLY acclaimed Finnish film director **Aki Kaurismäki** stated: "What makes the arms trade between Finland and Israel especially disgraceful is the fact that it is carried out with companies and weapons which have had a central role in the killing of civilians in the territories illegally occupied by Israel. At the same time Finland places itself in a questionable light in the UN, where it has promoted a treaty which bans arms trade with countries guilty of violations against human rights and international law."

PROFESSOR emeritus of international law at the University of Helsinki, **Lauri Hannikainen**, noted: "I am extremely concerned about Israel's occupation of Palestine and Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara, because both states seriously violate international law. Finland should not carry out arms trade with such states." Professor of legal history and Roman law at Helsinki University, **Jukka Kekkonen**, asserted: "Finland's arms trade with Israel supports an illegal occupation."

ACTOR Martti Suosalo labelled the Finnish-Israeli arms trade "sad and shameful" and professor **Teivo Teivainen**, the Head of the Political Science Department at the University of Helsinki, called it "grotesque". **Päivi Muma**, a psychotherapist and winner of the Florence Nightingale Medal, stated: "I am absolutely opposed to the buying of arms from Israel. I do not want our country to support the killing of civilians in any way."

THE TWO finalists in the ongoing UAV bid are BlueBird Aero Systems and Aeronautics Defence Systems. Both companies have strong links with Israel's illegalities. BlueBird's UAVs were used in air strike executions carried out in Gaza by the Israeli Air Force. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, the Israeli military killed at least 87 civilians in more than 40 UAV attacks during the three-week-long assault on Gaza that began on 27 December 2008.

AERONAUTICS' UAVs were also reportedly used during Israel's operations on the Gaza Strip. Additionally, Aeronautics is one of the companies that have created a perimeter-control system for the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. The company also develops hi-tech systems with military applications, such as perimeter control radar systems and bomb fuzes.

THE CHRONOLOGY of responses to the campaign from the Finnish government and officials has been revealing. First, the Ministry of Defence tried to convince the Finnish public that there is no political dimension to its arms trade with Israel. Later, the then-President of Finland, **Tarja Halonen**, belittled the significance of the trade and said it had no negative impact on the Middle East peace process. And now that the Finnish literati has adopted quite a different approach to the Finnish-Israeli military trade from the policy-makers, the Finnish government seeks to stifle public debate and undermine unprecedented political opposition by trying to conceal the details of the trade by legal means.

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