



Occupied Jerusalem, 10 January 2014

To:

Helsinki Regional Transport Authority (HRT) and local councillors in Finland

**Concerning Veolia:**

**An appeal from Palestinian civil society in Jerusalem**

Dear members of the HRT Board,

Dear councillors,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, a Palestinian human rights coalition consisting of 25 community organizations and NGOs. We have learned that you are considering signing transport contracts with the French multinational Veolia for buses in cities and towns under your jurisdiction, including the towns of Sipoo and Kirkkonummi. Writing from Palestinian East Jerusalem under Israeli occupation, we would like to confirm that Veolia provides substantial support to the illegal Israeli annexation and settlement enterprise in our city through its involvement in the construction and operation of the illegal Jerusalem Light Rail (JLR) in occupied Palestinian territory. We would like to emphasize that Veolia has ignored repeated calls to terminate its business involvement in the JLR, which amounts to complicity in serious Israeli violations of international law, war crimes and abuses of Palestinian human rights in occupied East Jerusalem.

We ask you sincerely to adopt a firm stand for the rule of law and the responsibility of corporations such as Veolia to respect human rights. We urge you to follow the example of numerous city- and regional councils in Europe and elsewhere and not to reward Veolia with a contract in any town or city under your jurisdiction. Trusting that you will make the right decision, we enclose some relevant background information.

*Israel's serious violations of international law in occupied East Jerusalem, a crisis for Palestinians*

In 1967 Israel annexed occupied East Jerusalem to its own territory. Since then, Israel has systematically pursued the development of a so-called "metropolitan" or "greater" Jerusalem with a Jewish majority, mainly on expropriated Palestinian land in occupied East

Jerusalem and the surrounding West Bank.<sup>1</sup> Israel has been constructing illegal Jewish settlements and related infrastructure, such as the illegal Wall and transport infrastructure for the settlers, including highways, trains and the JRL. At the same time, Israel denies access to occupied East Jerusalem to Palestinians from the West Bank. For Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, systematic discrimination has resulted in home demolitions, forced evictions and displacement. As a report of the heads of 25 European missions in Jerusalem concluded, “the continued expansion of settlements, restrictive zoning and planning, on-going demolitions and evictions, an inequitable education policy, difficult access to health care, the inadequate provision of resources and investment and the precarious residency issue have not only serious humanitarian consequences, they undermine the Palestinian presence in East Jerusalem”.<sup>2</sup>

The UN Security Council has strongly and repeatedly condemned Israel’s annexation and settlement policy in occupied East Jerusalem and called upon states not to recognize or assist these illegal activities.<sup>3</sup> In 2004, the International Court of Justice affirmed these Security Council resolutions and clarified that Israel, with this policy, is responsible for serious violations of international customary and treaty law, such as the acquisition of territory by force, violation of the right of Palestinians to self-determination, forced population transfer and systematic violation of Palestinian property rights and freedom of movement.<sup>4</sup> In 2013, the UN Human Rights Council’s Fact Finding Mission confirmed that the Israeli settlement activities in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, result in war crimes which fall under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.<sup>5</sup>

### *The illegal business of Veolia*

Veolia Transportation, a wholly owned Veolia subsidiary, owns 80% of Connex Jerusalem, which provides all operation and maintenance service for the Jerusalem Light Rail (JLR). Veolia is also a shareholder in the CityPass consortium that runs the JLR based on a contract valid until 2038. Running between West Jerusalem and illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, the JLR is explicitly designed to provide transport solutions for the more than 300,000 Israeli settlers living in and around occupied East Jerusalem and to tie these illegal settlements more firmly into the state of Israel. The first line of the JRL, which has been completed, runs to the settlement of Pisgat Zeev in the north of occupied East Jerusalem. It crosses the Palestinian neighbourhoods of Shu’fat and Beit Hanina, where Israeli authorities have confiscated and destroyed Palestinian property since 2001, in order to accommodate utilities for the JRL.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/200205\\_land\\_grab](http://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/200205_land_grab), p. 102 - 104

<sup>2</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/10\\_01\\_11\\_eu\\_hom\\_report\\_on\\_east\\_jerusalem.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/10_01_11_eu_hom_report_on_east_jerusalem.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, UN Security Council Resolutions 465 and 478 of 1980.

<sup>4</sup> ICJ *Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in Occupied Palestinian Territory* of 9 July 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Fact Finding Mission, paragraph 104, at:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A-HRC-22-63\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A-HRC-22-63_en.pdf)

Currently, Veolia is also involved in the planned extension of the already existing JLR-line to the settlement of Neve Ya'akov and the planned addition of up to five new train lines from West Jerusalem to Israeli settlements in occupied East Jerusalem. According to news published by the CityPass consortium and the Israeli press in September 2013, the extension of the existing line is due to be completed by 2016, with completion of the five other lines scheduled in the following years.<sup>6</sup>

Under international law, the JRL would be legal only, if it were constructed for the benefit of the occupied Palestinian people. The fact that East Jerusalem Palestinians may “also use” the train is irrelevant in this context. Based on the facts, the JRL, however, reinforces Israel's illegal annexation and settlement enterprise. By establishing, operating and maintaining the JRL, Veolia not only violates its stated commitment to the UN Global Compact but is directly complicit in the serious Israeli violations of international law and war crimes which undermine the human rights of Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem.

#### *Corporate accountability of Veolia is a global concern*

Already in March 2010, the UN Human Rights Council expressed its “grave concern” at “the Israeli decision to establish the JRL in clear violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.”<sup>7</sup> In September 2012, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Prof Richard Falk reviewed business operations relating to Israeli settlements in his report to the UN General Assembly, including the operations of Veolia. He affirmed that all business enterprises are required to respect international humanitarian law and human rights and to abstain from cooperating with the illegal Israeli settlements. He further concluded that “all companies that operate in or otherwise have dealings with Israeli settlements should be boycotted, until such time as they bring their operations fully into line with international human rights standards and practice.”<sup>8</sup> The 2013 UN fact finding mission on the Israeli settlements recommended that business enterprises terminate all operations related to the illegal Israeli settlements and urged states – including governments and municipal authorities – to adopt the measures required to ensure that businesses will do so.<sup>9</sup>

The Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem works on a daily basis with Palestinian individuals and communities most affected by Israeli violations of international law. We urge the Board of the HRT and municipal councils in Finland to act upon the duty of public bodies to ensure that businesses respect international law and to avoid doing business with complicit corporations such as Veolia.

The Civic Coalition Jerusalem is inspired by public institutions and private citizens worldwide who have worked hard to ensure that Veolia respects its corporate responsibilities. Several

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/business/.premium-1.548128>

<sup>7</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/37BF1829818D0B788525770D00536076>

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, A/67/379 of 19 September 2012, paragraphs 43 – 46, 89 – 91.

<sup>9</sup> Supra, paragraph 117.

financial institutions across Europe have already divested their shares in Veolia, and public authorities in the UK, France, Sweden, Australia, the United States and elsewhere have decided not to award Veolia public service contracts. Having lost out on contracts worth more than US\$20 billion, Veolia sold in the summer of 2013 its settlement bus operations in the occupied West Bank to an Israeli company,<sup>10</sup> while continuing waste collection services for illegal Israeli settlements, among them settlements in the occupied Jordan Valley.<sup>11</sup> With regard to Veolia's illegal business in occupied East Jerusalem, the company announced in 2010 that it intends to end its involvement in the Jerusalem Light Rail. However, Veolia has not set any clear timeline for its withdrawal.<sup>12</sup> The company's claim that regulators have blocked a planned sale of its share of the JRL to the Israeli company Egged is no valid justification for the ongoing complicity in Israeli violations of international law, war crimes and abuses of Palestinian human rights in occupied East Jerusalem.

Based on the above, we urge you not to support violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and not to award a contract to Veolia.

Zakaria Odeh  
Executive Director

The Civic Coalition for Palestinians Rights in Jerusalem  
[www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org](http://www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org)

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<sup>10</sup> <http://whoprofits.org/content/veolia-transportation-sold-remaining-bus-lines-afikim>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.whoprofits.org/company/veolia-environnement>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.veolia.com/en/medias/focus-on/jlrt.htm>