

Dec. 17, 2013

Dear Helsinki Regional Transport Authority members and councils members,

It has come to our knowledge that the Helsinki Regional Transport Authority (HRT) in Finland, is holding a tender for the provision of public bus services, and that one of the participating companies is Veolia.

In light of Veolia's participation in the tender, it is of utmost importance that you receive reliable information about the grave misconduct of Veolia in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Veolia Environment and its subsidiaries are involved in violations of international law and human rights and have a record of discriminatory practices in Israel and the OPT. Civil society organizations have been campaigning to encourage Veolia to cease from these practices. Nevertheless, the company continues its extensive involvement in the occupation of Palestinian Territories and its blatant disregard of ethical guidelines and international standards of social corporate responsibility.

In 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), principal judicial organ of the United Nations and, noteworthy, based in the Peace Palace in The Hague, has ruled the Separation Wall illegal. ICJ has also found that the Israeli settlements in the OPT have been established in breach of international law.

Hence, business activity and profit from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the occupation of Palestinian Territories contradicts the international humanitarian law and human rights standards. Such profit undermines political progress and peace-building efforts. By so doing, it directly fuels the cycle of violence and bloodshed in the Middle East and inflicts further oppression and suffering on Palestinians and insecurity on Israelis.

All information cited in this letter regarding the involvement of Veolia in the occupation was retrieved in the course of the independent research center Who Profits from the Occupation? (Who Profits). This project publishes information and in-depth reports about the commercial involvement of Israeli and international companies in the occupation of Palestinian and Syrian land, and human rights and international (humanitarian) law violations it entails. High standards of research quality and accuracy have positioned Who Profits as a leading source of reliable information and in-depth knowledge on corporate involvement in the Palestinian Territories. See www.whoprofits.org for additional information.

Corporations are a powerful force in the contemporary world-order, particularly in areas of conflict. Their complicity with violations of international law and human rights can fuel the

cycle of violence; in contrast, social corporate responsibility can play a crucial role in instilling peace and prosperity. Often, the choice between these two poles depends on the willingness of the international community – municipalities and governments, churches and communities – to demand respect for international law and human rights from these corporations.

1. Veolia's Involvement in International Law and Human Rights Violations

1.1. Jerusalem Light Rail Project

Veolia Transportation has been contracted for the construction of the Jerusalem Light Rail. The main aim of the project is to connect the illegal settlements built on occupied Palestinian land of East Jerusalem with the Israeli territory of West Jerusalem. The construction of the rail route itself involves exploitation of an occupied land that is not in the service of the occupied population, and hence violates International Humanitarian Law and the fourth Geneva Convention¹.

In response to this misconduct, the PLO - the representative body of the Palestinian people - has taken legal action against Veolia in a French court of law.

The present involvement of Veolia in this project is two-fold:

- a. Veolia Transportation owns 5% of CityPass – the group that won the tender to establish and operate the Jerusalem Light Rail Project until 2036.
- b. Veolia Transportation owns approximately 80% of Connex Jerusalem Ltd, which provides all services of operation and maintenance for the Light Rail.

Despite the company's announcement from October 2010; that it would sell its shares in CityPass and in Connex Jerusalem Ltd. Veolia is still holds its shares in these companies².

1.2. Operation of Landfill Site on Occupied Land and Exploitation of Natural Resources in contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention

Veolia Environmental Services Israel, a subsidiary of Veolia, owns and operates the Tovlan Landfill in the occupied Jordan Valley. The waste transferred to the Tovlan Landfill originates from recycle factories from within Israel and from settlements in the West Bank. The company uses captured Palestinian land and natural resources for the needs of Israeli settlements from both sides of the green line.

¹ Article 49, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949

² "Veolia Israel's CEO: This is how environmental businesses will become the fastest developing businesses in Israel. " The Marker, by: Avi Bar-Eli, 16.1.2012:
<http://whoprofits.org/content/interview-veolia-israels-ceo>

In a response to an enquiry by Who Profits On October 10th, 2011, the Israeli Civil Administration enumerated eight Israeli companies which hold permits to transfer waste to the Tovlan landfill.³

Through this form of business activity, Veolia directly profits from provision of services to illegal settlements, and exploitation of natural and land resources benefiting the occupying power, violating the fourth Geneva Convention.⁴

2. Discriminatory Practices by Veolia

Two severe cases of discrimination have been recorded in the course of the Jerusalem Light Rail Project:

2.1 Discrimination of Israeli Citizens: Arab, Ultra-Religious Jews, and Married Women

In preparation for turning the Jerusalem Light Rail project operational, Veolia has published a classified advertisement for employees. This advertisement specified that "completion of military service" was a requirement for a wide variety of positions that do not require military service such as operation and control workers. This requirement is a known discriminatory practice in Israel, as it automatically disqualifies all Israeli citizens exempted from military service, including Arabs, Ultra-Religious Jews and married women.

In September 2009, the Israeli Regional Labor Court ruled that the inclusion of military service criteria as a job requirement for positions that do not require military background for the performance of the duties constitutes a case of illegal discrimination.

Following public criticism, Veolia removed this advertisement. Although Veolia has not re-posted this advertisement, it is unknown whether the criterion of military service remains in its employment practices.

2.2 Gender Discrimination and Segregation

Veolia announced that it would operate "kosher" train routes – segregated sitting areas for men (in the front of the train) and for women (in the back of the train). They later announced that the separation is unlikely to take place due to technical difficulties of reinforcing gender-based segregation.

³ Veolia's Involvement in the Occupied Jordan Valley – Press release :

<http://whoprofits.org/content/veolias-involvement-occupied-jordan-valley-%E2%80%93-update>

⁴ Articles 49 and 55, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949

We trust the Helsinki Regional Transport Authority to take the information above into serious consideration while assessing the different participants in the tender.

Thank You,

Who Profits research team

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