



Jerusalem, October 2012

Subject: Veolia and the Jerusalem light Rail Train (JLR) in East Jerusalem

Dear Madam, Sir,

I am writing to you on behalf of The Civic Coalition for Palestinians Rights in Jerusalem (CCPRJ), a Palestinian human rights coalition consisting of 23 Palestinian NGOs, to draw your attention to the role played by Veolia, the company that owns OV Region Utrecht, in the construction and operation of the Jerusalem Light Rail (JLR), the overarching intent and effect of which is to facilitate the permanent acquisition of occupied Palestinian land by Israel in violation of international law.

Reinforcement of the annexation of Palestinian land

Veolia Transportation, a wholly owned Veolia subsidiary, owns 80% of Convex Jerusalem, which provides all operation and maintenance service for the JLR and is a shareholder in the City Pass consortium that won the tender to establish and operate the JLR project until 2036. Running between west Jerusalem and illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, the first line of the JLR is explicitly designed to cement Israel's grip on illegal settlements and tie them more firmly into the state of Israel. The line facilitates the movement of 200,000 Jewish settlers who live illegally in 16 settlements built in occupied East Jerusalem, thus ensuring the viability and encouraging the on-going expansion of the settlements.

As a report by the heads of 25 European missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah published in January 2011 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".# The JLR project that Veolia is a principal partner of is a key pillar of the Israeli colonisation and ethnic cleansing of Palestinian land.

Confiscation and destruction of property

The construction of the first JLR line has led to the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian property. As early as 2001, Israeli authorities began expropriation of Palestinian land in the neighborhoods of Shu'afat and Beit Hanina areas to accommodate associated utilities necessary for the construction of the JLR. Businesses have been adversely affected as customer parking lots were removed. The confiscation of privately owned land from Palestinians to facilitate the construction of a light rail from which they will not benefit continued until 2010. In addition, streets in Palestinian neighborhoods have been reduced to a single lane to allow for construction, causing major traffic congestion and increased noise and air pollution.

A violation of international law

In 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled the construction of Israel's Wall and settlements to be in breach of international law. Citing the Hague Convention IV on Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, 18 October 1907, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's Negotiation Support Unit argues, "As an occupant, Israel has no sovereign rights or title to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem. Consequently, it may only undertake changes in East Jerusalem and the rest of the OPT for the benefit of the occupied Palestinian population or for military necessity. As the Light Rail neither caters to the needs of Palestinian civilians nor serves any genuine military purpose, the Light Rail constitutes an illegal change to East Jerusalem and neighbouring West Bank areas."[#]

In March 2010, the UN Human Rights Council expressed its "grave concern" at "the Israeli decision to establish and operate a tramway between West Jerusalem and the Israeli settlement of Pisgat Zeev, which is in clear violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions."[#]

An unethical and risky choice

Reports of Veolia pulling out of the JLR have been greatly exaggerated. While Veolia has announced its intentions to sell its stake in the JLR to Israeli company Egged, the deal will take at least five years to complete, the current deal is subject to a legal challenge by Egged competitor Dan.

In addition to the JLR, Veolia also operates other infrastructure projects that facilitate Israeli violations of international law, including bus services and waste collection services for illegal settlements and a landfill site in the occupied Jordan Valley for the exclusive use of Israeli settlements.

In response to its complicity with Israeli violations of international law, financial institutions across Europe have divested their shares in Veolia and public authorities in the UK, France, Sweden, Australia and beyond have decided not to award Veolia public service provision contracts worth in excess of €10 billion. Veolia has subsequently announced losses of €67 million for the first half of 2011, forcing the company to announce massive cost-cutting and a decision to pull out of 37 of the countries in which it operates. Veolia is likely to continue to be in deep financial

difficulties for as long as it continues is complicity with Israeli violations of international law. In addition, the Veolia share prices has fallen at least 50% in the last six months while its competitors prospered and the company recently uncovered accountancy fraud within its organization worth over €80 million.

An appeal from CCDPRJ

CCPRJ works on a daily basis with those most impacted by Israeli violations of international law. We believe that the international community as a whole – including local authorities – must take action in support of a just peace. Corporations such as Veolia must not be allowed to profit from Israeli oppression of Palestinian rights and local authorities have a moral duty not to do business as usual with those that do.

We urge the Utrecht municipality to follow the lead taken by other European local authorities and refrain from awarding OV Region Utrecht or other Veolia companies any local contracts.

Zakaria Odeh
Executive Director
The Civic Coalition for Palestinians Rights in Jerusalem