

Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Case Studies: G4S



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Introduction: The Pitch

Group 4 Securicor (G4S) calls itself an “integrated security company” specializing in “security and related services” and has more than 623,000 employees operating in 120 countries. G4S works in sectors where security and safety risks are considered a strategic threat by providing “outsourced business processes and facilities” with services ranging from software and hardware to training and subcontracted

personnel. G4S emphasizes safety and security in marketing its services, but the company falls far short of either

when it comes to the treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons.



The Catch

G4S provides equipment, personnel, and services to five Israeli prisons and interrogation centers known to hold political prisoners, including children.



G4S provides equipment, personnel, and services to five Israeli prisons and interrogation centers, at least some of which are known to hold political prisoners, including children. G4S also services various checkpoints along the separation barriers between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, including stationing private guards at Israeli military bases and checkpoints.

These operations mean that G4S has a vested interest in continued tension between Palestine and Israel, especially as it relates to profits resulting from the mass incarceration of Palestinian men, women, and children in the facilities they service.

G4S also supplies security systems to checkpoints and illegal settlements in the West Bank. Because Palestinian civilians inevitably experience harassment and even detention at such checkpoints, such operations violate Palestinians' right to freedom of movement in the West Bank, leaving farmers unable to reach their land and children unable to attend school. By providing Israeli settlements with security equipment in the West Bank, G4S helps to enable expanded Israeli colonization of Palestinian territory, reducing the chances of peace between Palestinians and Israelis.



By supplying security equipment to checkpoints and illegal settlements in the West Bank, G4S contributes to tension in the region.

The Campaign

G4S began to receive broad international attention during the historic hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners in 2012, during which Palestinian human rights organizations called for G4S to be held accountable for their involvement with the Israeli prison system. During that year, Amnesty International Denmark terminated its contract with G4S “because the company’s global activities do not live up to Amnesty International’s requirements for corporate action in relation to human rights.” Not long thereafter, the European Union decided not to renew a major contract with G4S because of concerns raised by members of the European Parliament. As word spread, other companies, organizations, and aid groups divested from G4S, and in October 2012, UN Special Rapporteur Richard Falk criticized G4S as a “prime example of a company that should be held to account for participation in Israeli violations of international law.”



Subvertising campaign against G4S at King's Cross in London.

Another turning point came in February 2013, when Arafat Jaradat was found dead in his cell in a G4S-serviced prison after seven days of interrogation left him with bruised lungs, three broken ribs, and blood in his nose and mouth. Public outrage at Jaradat’s death refocused attention on G4S, and in the next months student groups at universities across the United Kingdom voted to divest as protests became more widespread. Because G4S is a British-Danish company, activists were especially active in Europe and actions included a large and well-funded subvertising campaign across London and the UK. There were also frequently protests outside G4S office buildings, causing the cancellation of several board and committee meetings between 2012-2014.

The Victories



In May 2014, the Gates Foundation sold all \$170M it had invested in G4S after receiving a petition sponsored by more than 100 organizations internationally. Finally, in June 2014, “reputational issues” (according to G4S investment analysts) forced the company to announce that it does not intend to renew contracts with the Israeli Prison Service after they expire in 2017. Another important development came soon afterwards, in November 2014, when the city of Durham, North Carolina ended a contract with G4S following a campaign by BDS activists, becoming the first municipality in the United States bring its policies into alignment with the stated goals of the Palestinian solidarity movement.

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Photo Credits

- A – Campaign to Free Ahmad Sa'adat (www.freeahmadsaadat.org/2014/10/21/october-23-umea-sweden-day-of-solidarity-with-palestinian-prisoners/)
- B – World Bulletin (www.worldbulletin.net/haber/134072/s-africans-protest-against-g4s-over-palestinian-prisoners)
- C – Matthew Aslett (www.demotix.com/news/1260702/stop-g4s-protest-g4s-annual-general-meeting-london#media-1261104)
- D – International Business Times (www.ibtimes.co.uk/g4s-end-all-israeli-torture-prison-contracts-within-next-three-years-1451632)
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- G – Rex in The Telegraph (www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/supportservices/10884767/Bill-Gates-sells-entire-stake-in-G4S.html)