

# VIDEO: Canadian Students Demand Divestment from Israeli Apartheid

Carleton University's War Portfolio

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Theme: [History](#)

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## Carleton University's War Portfolio: Students Demand Divestment from Apartheid

General Dynamics. Shell. Apache Corporation. Philip Morris. Pfizer. These are weapons manufacturers, oil companies, mining corporations, tobacco companies, and pharmaceutical giants. Notorious war profiteers, environmental destroyers, and human rights violators. Morally and ethically, these are not the types of firms with which one would expect Carleton University to have any sort of affiliation.

And yet, despite Carleton President Roseann Runte's characterization of the university as an institution that is 'engaged in solving real-world problems,' and her proclamation that it emphasizes human rights and social justice, Students Against Israeli Apartheid – Carleton (SAIA) has discovered that the Carleton University Pension Fund has tens of millions of dollars invested in these and other companies, which are willing contributors to the litany of social and political ailments that plague our global community.

The Pension Fund, which provides retirement income for Carleton's staff and faculty, invests in some 550 companies, for a total value of about \$766,194,000. Institutions with pension funds of this size often adopt ethical guidelines or socially responsible investment policies (SRI), which seek to achieve both financial return and social good. SRI encourages investment in companies that protect the environment, respect human rights, and have ethical labour practices. In Canada, several universities including McGill, Queens, and UBC have adopted elements of SRI, while many institutions in the UK have implemented ethical investment guidelines and divested from the arms trade. In the USA, Yale and other schools have policies prohibiting them from conducting business with companies engaged in 'socially injurious' activities.

These relatively progressive investment policies can be sharply contrasted with Carleton's fund, whose only mandate, according to the Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures for the Trust Fund created Under the Carleton University Retirement Plan, is to maximize profit. Carleton appears to have no qualms about investing in and profiting from companies that reap their gains by fuelling wars, spreading ecological devastation, and committing blatant violations of international law.

Beginning this month, SAIA will take action against Carleton's decidedly unethical investment practices by launching a divestment campaign against five companies that are complicit in human rights violations and crimes under international law in Palestine:

Motorola, BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman, L-3 Communications, and Tesco supermarkets.

Motorola, BAE, and Northrop Grumman are perhaps the most egregious of the bunch, as they all supplied Israel with military equipment that was used in the 2008-2009 bombardment of Gaza. BAE and Northrop Grumman are among the world's largest arms companies, and their products sold to Israel include components for F-16 aircraft, Hellfire missiles, and Apache helicopters. Motorola's involvement in Gaza was through its subsidiary, Motorola Israel, which was the leading Israeli company in developing and manufacturing electronic fuses for aircraft bombs and guided munitions used during the three-week assault.

The Report of the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (the Goldstone Report), released in September, found clear evidence that Israel committed major war crimes and possible crimes against humanity during bombardment of Gaza, which killed over 1,400 people. Many of these crimes would have been committed using the munitions provided by Motorola, BAE, and Northrop Grumman.

In the occupied West Bank, meanwhile, Motorola and Tesco actively breach the Fourth Geneva Convention on a daily basis. Article 49 of the Convention states that an occupying power may not change the demographic composition of the occupied territory and must not interfere, in an arbitrary manner, in the lives of the occupied civilian population. This stipulation renders Israel's continued construction of Jewish-only settlements to be illegal.

In defiance of Article 49, Motorola manufactures a multitude of perimeter surveillance systems and "virtual" electronic fences that are installed around dozens of settlements in the occupied West Bank. These virtual fences can often extend up to 700 metres outside of the settlement, thereby confiscating not only the area upon which the settlement is built, but also a vast swath of land around the settlement itself. By establishing such equipment inside the occupied West Bank, Motorola entrenches the infrastructure of occupation, and solidifies illegal settlements as "facts on the ground."

Tesco is also complicit in developing the settlements, as it sells products that originate in the illegal colonies. By selling settlement produce, Tesco ignores the blatant illegality of the settlements, and facilitates their expansion and economic growth. The settlements are allowed to flourish and export their products, while Palestinian agricultural life – and thus the Palestinian economy – is decimated.

Furthermore, Tesco's supplier for these settlement products is an Israeli export company called Carmel-Agrexco, which is notorious for implementing slavery-type working conditions in which Palestinian children as young as 9 years old are put to work in its factories. Workers in the factory are paid less than \$3 per hour, are not allowed breaks during 8-hour shifts, cannot unionize, and are forced to work without contracts. Palestinian workers require 3 hours of travelling time to reach their jobs because they are forced to cross the Hamra checkpoint, which is the largest in the occupied West Bank. At this and other checkpoints, the workers are often strip-searched and humiliated daily.

Motorola and Tesco's facilitation of settlement expansion and their development of the settlements themselves renders them in direct violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Additionally, the activities of Motorola and L-3 Communications, a US-based "homeland security and defence" company, put them in contravention of the International Court of

Justice (ICJ). In 2004, the ICJ ruled Israel's Apartheid Wall, which cuts deep within occupied Palestinian territory, to be illegal, and declared that no aid or assistance should be given for its construction. In spite of the ICJ decision, both companies continue to supply Israel with equipment such as body scanners, motion sensors, and watchtowers, which are used to fortify the Wall and the hundreds of Israeli military checkpoints that control the West Bank.

In essence, each of these firms reaps great benefit by supporting and entrenching the regime of apartheid that has been imposed on the Palestinian people. The companies' actions conflict with Carleton's legal responsibility to adhere to the principles of international law, as stipulated in the Nuremburg Principles I and II. As such, by investing in and profiting from the firms in spite of their crimes, the university itself becomes complicit in violations of international law.

While the legal obligations alone should be sufficient grounds for divestment, there is another strong impetus for SAIA's campaign. In 2005, 171 organizations from the full spectrum of Palestinian civil society came together to call for an international boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign (BDS) against Israel until it complies with its obligations under international law.

Although the Palestine-centred BDS campaign is separate from the more broad-based call for SRI, the two demands are by no means mutually exclusive. Inspired by the movement to boycott South African apartheid, BDS is driven by the idea that it is unacceptable for states, institutions, and individuals to continue business as usual relations with Israel as long as it practices apartheid in Palestine. Instead, the international community has a responsibility to end Israeli impunity by cutting ties with apartheid, stripping away Israel's liberal-democratic facade, and exposing it as a pariah state.

For the past 4½ years, BDS has spread like wildfire, becoming a truly global movement. BDS activism is especially strong on university campuses, as student mobilization has brought about many concrete successes worldwide. The most notable victory came at Hampshire College, where in February 2009, the administration gave in to massive student pressure to divest from six companies complicit in the Israeli occupation. Additional successes have come in the UK, where several universities have agreed to divest from BAE Systems and other companies involved in Israeli crimes.

These victories are models for SAIA's divestment campaign at Carleton, which is the first Palestine-centred divestment initiative in Canada. By mobilizing the university community, SAIA will call on the administration to immediately divest from the five companies mentioned here, and to work with the Carleton community to adopt SRI for future investments. Hopes are high that, through a well-planned local campaign, as well as the natural growth of BDS, momentum will pick up at universities across the country and similar initiatives will emerge to form a national movement to cut campus ties with Israeli apartheid.

Adopting SRI would go a long way towards making Carleton a more ethical institution, and would align it with its obligations under international law. Similarly, divesting from these companies would be a major step for the BDS movement, and for the pursuit of justice for the Palestinian people. The international precedents for both actions have been set. The pressure is now on for Carleton to do the right thing.

Aidan Macdonald is a member of Students Against Israeli Apartheid – Carleton.

## **CAMPAIGN STATEMENT**

### **Carleton University Students Launch Divestment Campaign**

For the past several months, Students Against Israeli Apartheid – Carleton (SAIA), a student group at Carleton University in Ottawa that is committed to supporting the Palestinian struggle for freedom, has been conducting research on Carleton's investments in Israeli apartheid. The Carleton Pension Fund currently lacks any ethical guidelines, with its only mandate being the maximization of profit. SAIA has discovered that the Pension Fund, which provides retirement income for Carleton staff and faculty, currently has some \$2,762,535 invested in five companies that are complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people. In light of these findings, SAIA has launched a campaign calling on Carleton to immediately divest from the offending corporations: Motorola, BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman, L-3 Communications, and Tesco supermarkets, as well as to adopt a socially responsible investment policy for all of its investments.

Motorola is involved in designing and implementing perimeter surveillance systems around illegal Israeli settlements and military camps in the West Bank. Motorola and its subsidiaries also have hundreds of millions of dollars worth of contracts to supply the Israeli military with telecommunications technology, checkpoint security and control systems. By providing support for the Israeli military, Motorola plays a role in ensuring that settlement expansion will continue, and that the occupation will deepen, in a clear violation of international law.

BAE Systems is the world's third-largest arms producer. Both BAE and its Israeli subsidiary, Rokar, contribute to weaponry used by Israel to attack Palestinian civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. BAE produces cluster bombs and the F-16 combat aircraft, which were used during the 2008-2009 assault on the Gaza Strip, which killed over 1,400 Palestinians, most of whom were non-combatant civilians.

Northrop Grumman, one of the world's largest weapons manufacturers, provided the Israeli military with many of the parts for the Apache AH64D Longbow Helicopter, which was described by Amnesty International as a piece of "key equipment used by the [Israeli military] in the [December 2008 – January 2009] Gaza bombing campaign." Furthermore, Northrop Grumman is the sole provider of radars for the F-16 combat aircraft. It also assists in producing the Longbow Hellfire 2 missiles, which, as has been documented by many human rights organizations, were widely used against Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

L-3 Communications is one of the many large multinational firms aiding in the construction and maintenance of the system of military checkpoints that severely restrict Palestinian freedom of movement in the West Bank and around Gaza. The matrix of checkpoints has been condemned by human rights organizations as a brutally repressive system that violates the basic human rights of the Palestinian people. In addition to being a means of political repression and land annexation, the checkpoints constitute a tool of collective punishment, which is a crime under international law.

Tesco Supermarkets is a large United Kingdom-based international grocery and general merchandising retail chain. It has been the target of social justice activists in the U.K. for selling produce originating from illegal Israeli settlements, for mislabeling products coming from the settlements as "West Bank", as well as for using an exporter, Carmel-Agrexco,

which has been criticized for using slavery-type working conditions in its factories in the occupied West Bank. Tesco's financial support for the illegal Israeli settlements lends them legitimacy and enables their economic growth and physical expansion, while simultaneously inhibiting the development of the Palestinian economy.

Carleton is no stranger to BDS activism, and it has a strong precedent to build upon. In 1987, Carleton divested from all companies complicit in the apartheid regime in South Africa. Carleton's president at the time wrote a memorandum, saying, "Carleton University abhors apartheid and will do all it can to show its position on apartheid within its business practices." Given Carleton's past commitment to divesting from apartheid regimes, SAIA is calling on the university to once again place itself on the right side of history by ending its investments in the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people.

The South African victory serves as an inspiring model for SAIA's divestment campaign, which is the first Palestine-centred divestment initiative in Canada. Hopes are high that, through a well-planned local campaign, as well as the natural growth of BDS, momentum will pick up at universities across the country and similar initiatives will emerge to form a national movement to cut campus ties with Israeli apartheid.

Specifically, SAIA recommends that:

1. The Carleton University Board of Governors, via the Pension Fund Committee, immediately divest of its stock in BAE Systems, L-3 Communications, Motorola, Northrop Grumman, and Tesco
2. Carleton University refrain from investing in other companies involved in violations of international law (for recommended guidelines see Conclusions/Recommendations section of the divestment report)
3. Carleton University work with the entire university community to develop, adopt, and implement a broader policy of Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) for its Pension Fund and other investments, through a transparent and effective process.

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