

Baroness Catherine Ashton
High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy /
Vice President of the European Commission
European External Action Service
1046 Brussels

25 March 2014

Dear Baroness Ashton,

We are requesting that the EEAS takes action to discourage European businesses from engaging in activities that facilitate the on-going expansion of Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law.

Many private European businesses are operating inside Israeli settlements, or maintaining economic relations with Israeli settlements, providing them with economic support.

There are several examples of the many ways in which European businesses contribute to the existence and expansion of the settlements.ⁱ Through their activities, they make direct and on-going contributions to Israeli violations of international law and to human rights abuses associated with the settlements.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which were endorsed by the EU, make it clear that governments have an obligation to ensure that businesses domiciled in their territory do not contribute to human rights abuses in their overseas operations, including by providing advice and guidance. In cases where businesses are operating in conflict areas, the Guiding Principles urge governments to provide *“adequate assistance to business enterprises to assess and address the heightened risks of abuses”*.ⁱⁱ

The Dutch government has recently taken commendable steps to address the contribution of Dutch businesses to violations of human rights and international law. In June 2013, engineering firm Royal Haskoning DHV withdrew from a sewage treatment project in occupied East Jerusalem following recommendations made by the government to that effect.ⁱⁱⁱ

In a similar fashion, the German government in 2011 successfully persuaded Deutsche Bahn to refrain from participating in the construction of the A1 Israeli railway, the final route of which will pass through occupied Palestinian territory in a clear violation of international law.^{iv}

We urge the EEAS to publish guidance discouraging European firms from maintaining economic relations with the settlements. Furthermore, the EU should use its presence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories to educate European businesses about the problems and risks associated with such relations and to encourage Member States to take similar action.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on how best the European Union can address this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

1. Emer Costello MEP, S&D (initiator)
2. Martina Anderson MEP, GUE/NGL
3. Margrete Auken MEP, Greens
4. Phil Bennion MEP, ALDE
5. Michael Cashman MEP, S&D
6. Nikos Chrysogelos MEP, Greens
7. Chris Davies MEP, ALDE
8. Véronique De Keyser MEP, S&D
9. Jill Evans MEP, Greens
10. Sergio Gaetano Cofferati MEP, S&D
11. Ana Gomes MEP, S&D
12. Catherine Grèze MEP, Greens
13. Richard Howitt MEP, S&D
14. Stephen Hughes MEP, S&D
15. Dennis De Jong MEP, GUE/NGL
16. Nicole Kiil-Nielsen MEP, Greens
17. Patrick Le Hyaric MEP, GUE/NGL
18. Kartika Liotard MEP, GUE/NGL
19. David Martin MEP, S&D
20. Marisa Matias MEP, GUE/NGL
21. Linda McAvan MEP, S&D
22. Emilio Menéndez del Valle MEP, S&D
23. Willy Meyer MEP, GUE/NGL
24. Paul Murphy MEP, GUE/NGL
25. Younous Omarjee MEP, GUE/NGL
26. Norbert Neuser MEP, S&D
27. Phil Prendergast MEP, S&D
28. Judith Sargentini MEP, Greens
29. Alda Sousa MEP, GUE/NGL
30. Bart Staes MEP, Greens
31. Keith Taylor MEP, Greens
32. Kyriacos Triantaphyllides MEP, GUE/NGL
33. Ivo Vajgl MEP, ALDE
34. Sabine Wils MEP, GUE/NGL
35. Graham Watson MEP, ALDE

- i www.eccpalestine.org/the-contribution-of-european-businesses-to-the-existence-and-expansion-of-illegal-israeli-settlements/
- ii http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf
- iii <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/bestanden/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2013/05/28/kamerbrief-met-reactie-op-rapport-dutch-economic-links-with-the-occupation/kamerbrief-met-reactie-op-rapport-dutch-economic-links-with-the-occupation.pdf>
- iv <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4b6b59fc-7a4b-11e0-bc74-00144feabdc0.html?siteedition=uk#axzz1Lvu7xMU>