

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Case Study #20

Country **Palestine**

Keywords: **Human Rights,
Boycotting, Cultural and
Economic resistance, Palestine,
Occupation**

STOP G4S CAMPAIGN

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The involvement, strategies and tactics of Palestinian civil society organizations in pressuring major multinational companies to divest from 'Israel'

BACKGROUND AND TIMELINE

Group 4 Securicor (G4S) is the world's largest security company, operating in more than 90 countries across six continents¹. 'G4S Israel', formerly called Hashmira, was one of the company's international subsidiaries. In 2007, 'G4S Israel' signed a contract with the Israeli Prison Authority to provide security systems and services to major prisons and detention centers. In subsequent years, the company was awarded multiple other contracts that serviced checkpoints, police headquarters, and governmental buildings, including an army base². Various reports have documented G4S's involvement in, or profiteering from, human rights abuses in Palestine³. The 2012 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on OPT called on businesses complicit in Israel's violations (including G4S) to exit these contracts. It further urged third parties to "vigorously pursue initiatives to boycott, divest and sanction the businesses highlighted in this report, within their own national contexts, until such time as they bring their policies and practices into line with international laws and standards, as well as the Global Compact."⁴

In April 2012, the Palestinian Political Prisoners' Movement launched a hunger strike to protest administrative detention, solitary confinement, and limitations on family visits. At the time, there were more than 4,600 Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli prisons and detention centers⁵. While BDS⁶ efforts against G4S began in 2010, the "Stop G4S" campaign was officially launched in 2012 by Palestinian civil society organizations and grassroots movements to support the hunger strike. It was launched on April 17, in commemoration of the Palestinian Political Prisoners Day⁷.

By way of historical context, it is important to note that Israel's current political status quo is an extension of the Zionist settler-colonial project that began prior to 1948⁸. There has been a long history in the Israeli regime's use of imprisonment as a means to suppress Palestinian popular resistance. For example, in the period 1987 – 1992, during the First Intifada, Israel detained thousands of Palestinians for their involvement in resisting oppression⁹. In this context, the prisoners' movement, as well as other categorical campaigns such as Stop G4S, could be seen as partial aspects of the broader Palestinian struggle for liberation.

¹G4s.com. (2019). G4S Corporate website. [online] Available at: <https://www.g4s.com/> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2019].

²Who Profits. (2019). "G4S Israel (Hashmira)": Who Profits Research Center. [online] Retrieved from: <https://whoprofits.org/company/g4s-israel-hashmira/> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2019].

³Cooper, T. and Anderson, T. (2015). "Imprisoned voices: Corporate complicity in the Israeli prison system". [online] Corporate Watch. Retrieved from: <https://corporatewatch.org/imprisoned-voices-corporate-complicity-in-the-israeli-prison-system/> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2019]; Pingeot, L. (2012). "Dangerous Partnership: Private Military & Security Companies and the UN". Global Policy Forum; Amnesty International (2011) "Out of Control: The Case for a Complete Overhaul of Enforced Removals by Private Contractors". Amnesty International UK. Retrieved from: (www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_21634.pdf) [Accessed 22 Apr. 2019].

⁴Falk, R. (2012). "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967". A/67/379, Sixty-seventh session. United Nations General Assembly. P. 25.

⁵Addameer. (2012). "Statistics". Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association. Retrieved from: http://www.addameer.org/statistics?field_date_of_statistics_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=04%2F01%2F2012&field_date_of_statistics_value_1%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=04%2F30%2F2012 [Accessed 22 Apr. 2019].

⁶The Palestinian-led global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement knowns as BDS.

⁷Deas, M. (2012). "Palestinian organisations call for action against G4S over role in Israeli jails". Electronic Intifada. Retrieved from: <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/michael-deas/palestinian-organisations-call-action-against-g4s-over-role-israeli-jails> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2019].

⁸Masalha, N. (1992). "Expulsions of The Palestinians. The Concept of «Transfer» In Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948". Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies; Dana, T. and Jarbawi, A. (2017). "A Century of Settler Colonialism in Palestine: Zionism's Entangled Project". Providence: Brown Journal of World Affairs. xxiv.

⁹Detentions were used against acts as simple as partaking in marches, distributing leaflets, and displaying flags. See Shahin, M. (n.d.). "Stories from the Intifada". Al Jazeera Remix. Retrieved May 17, 2019, from <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/palestineremix/stories-from-the-intifada.html#/?23>; see also Qumsiyeh, M. (2011). *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*. London; New York: Pluto Press.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS' ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT

In support of the hunger strike led by the Palestinian Political Prisoners' Movement, 12 Palestinian civil society bodies issued a call to boycott and divest from G4S due to its complicity in Israeli prisons¹⁰. The two main bodies that constituted the driving force behind this coalition were Addameer and the BDS National Committee (BNC). Addameer is an NGO established in 1992 to support prisoners and defend their rights. The BNC is considered the largest coalition in Palestinian civil society, encompassing hundreds of federations and umbrella organizations, and is the leadership of the global BDS grassroots movement¹¹.

There were close coordination efforts within the Stop G4S coalition internally, as well as with the Prisoners' Movement and other informal local groups in Palestine. The coordination served on research and fact-finding initiatives, messaging and discourse, campaign strategy, movement building, alliance formation, outreach and international solidarity, and calls to action. However, guided by the pre-existing approaches of the BDS movement, the coalition recognized that to win this battle at home, it needed to shift the battleground from within Palestine to the rest of the world.

Similarly, by 2012, the Palestinian-led BDS movement had already built a dynamic regional and global network and was able to involve non-Palestinian civil society actors and stakeholders in the G4S campaign. Such actors globally included student unions, university associations, political parties, and NGOs, as well as legislative assemblies such as the Kuwaiti Parliament, regional bodies like the European Union, and international bodies including the UN¹². The Stop G4S campaign was active in at least 15 countries (of which six were countries in the Arab world). The campaign engaged hundreds of organizations and bodies outside Palestine.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

In addressing the question of strategy, Michael Deas, the former International Coordinator at the BNC, explains that:

"The clear and direct way in which G4S participates in the Israeli prison complex means that campaigning against G4S provides another practical way within which those outside Palestine can take concrete action in solidarity with Palestinian political prisoners, a key source of inspiration and leadership of the Palestinian struggle. It also provides a material way to highlight and successfully challenge corporate complicity with Israel's oppression of Palestinians."¹³

Stop G4S is considered one of many BDS campaigns that employ the same logic. The main aim of boycott and divestment campaigns is to exert pressure on Israel in monetary terms. That entails secondary targets such as banks, pension funds, and corporations withdrawing existing investments, and refraining from new investments, in the Israeli economy. In 2014, the UN World Investment Report found that direct foreign investment in the Israeli economy dropped by 46 percent compared to 2013. According to the authors of the report, boycott campaigns are a partial reason behind this drop¹⁴.



The campaign followed a simple business-minded equation. If G4S' complicity in Israel's violations became a source of bad business, thereby affecting its overall profitability internationally, then G4S (the mother company) will be forced to divest. Based on this prediction, the campaign staged a multi-layered strategy. First, through lobbying or public pressure, it sought to convince third parties to end their security-service contracts with G4S and/or sell their shares in the company. Second, it sought to cause G4S to lose enough contracts and investments all over the world so that divestment becomes the sensible corporate decision. Third, it sought to render G4S an example for other multinational companies investing or considering to invest in Israel, thereby influencing foreign investment as a whole.

While this was the guiding strategy of the broader campaign, grassroots movements tend to have a naturally context-sensitive *modus operandi*, and thus local BDS groups and activists would develop their action plan concerning contracts and investments targeted locally. Those approaches would vary depending on the nature of the third party, i.e., the party who is a decision-maker regarding the contract or the investment in question. For example, if the target is prone to public pressure and is concerned about their reputation like UNICEF or the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, then the tactics would include mobilizing people and organizations to be involved in public actions such as protests, flash-mobs, and online and traditional media coverage. If the target is open to dialogue, such as progressive institutions, small social enterprises, and even small companies or corporate chains with ethical values, then advocacy and internal lobbying would be adopted. As for student associations, unions, and political parties, since voting is the main tactic, organizing members to vote and awareness-raising would be involved.

In retrospect, it can be said that the Stop G4S campaign used one master tactic, which was "Distributed Action."¹⁵ This tactic encompassed a wide array of coordinated, parallel actions that are geographically dispersed and led by diverse constituencies. For example, the UK Student Palestine Solidarity Network organized consecutive campaigns across more than a dozen university campuses leading at least five universities to end their campus security contracts with G4S¹⁶. At the same time, the #UNDropG4S campaign conducted actions on the same day at UN offices in five different countries around the world. Local BDS groups in Jordan and Lebanon succeeded in ending G4S contracts with six UN agencies altogether worth at least \$3 million USD¹⁷.

¹⁰Deas, *supra* 7.

¹¹BDSmovement.net (2019). "Palestinian BDS National Committee" [online]. Available at: <https://bdsmovement.net/bnc> [Accessed May 2019, 17].

¹²BDSmovement.net (2019). "Stop G4S" [online]. Available at: <https://bdsmovement.net/stop-g4s> [Accessed May 2019, 17].

¹³Deas, M. (2019, May 10). Personal communication.

¹⁴Glantz, M. (2015, June 24). Foreign investment in Israel cut by half in 2014. Retrieved May 2019, 17, from <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L4672509,00-.html>.

¹⁵Aroneanu, P. (2012). *Distributed Action. In Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* (pp. 39-36). New York City, NY: OR Books.

¹⁶BDSmovement.net (2019). "G4S Timeline" [online]. Available at: <https://bdsmovement.net/g4s-timeline> [Accessed May 2019, 17].

¹⁷See 2016 - 2014 reports by The United Nations Office for Project Services. The Annual Statistical Report on United Nations Procurement (Rep.). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/news/what-did-the-united-nations-buy-last-year> [Accessed May 2019, 17].

Zaid Shuabi, the former BNC Arab World Coordinator, explains: "A few million dollars in each country may not be a big deal for a company like G4S, the third largest corporation in the world. But, when these contracts and investments add up, they accumulate billions of dollars. Furthermore, these losses have a huge impact on the smaller national subsidiaries whose management then is forced to exert pressure on the mother company to divest from Israel."¹⁸

There is no accurate estimate to date calculating G4S's losses around the world. However, the value of investments withdrawn and contracts lost may indicate the extent of the loss. For example, the value of the security contract that the BBC elected not to renew in 2014 totaled more than \$130 million USD. In the same year, the Bill Gates Foundation divested its entire stake totaling \$170 million USD and during the same month the US United Methodist Church, which has an investment portfolio of over \$20 billion USD, sold all its shares in G4S¹⁹.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

Angela Davis explains that the neoliberal economic model, which is rooted in privatization, has led to an intertwining between state coercion and profit, represented in the privatization of imprisonment and warfare²⁰. She explains how G4S was not only profiteering from violations in Palestine, but also violations across its international operations, including private prisons owned and run by G4S, immigration deportation centers, and labor standards. Intersectional solidarity appears to be a significant factor that helped the Stop G4S Campaign gain greater prominence on the social justice front. Intersectionality identifies an overlap between the sources of oppression faced by marginalized groups based on their gender, race, social class, and other bases, invoking the possibilities of joint action that transcends those boundaries.

The Stop G4S campaign built connections with groups inflicted by the wrongdoings of the company, such as housing, asylum, and labor rights groups²¹. There were many such groups responding to injustices such as the case of Jimmy Mubenga, an Angolan migrant who was killed at the hands of G4S guards during forcible deportation from the UK, or the labor violations²² faced by G4S workers in Malawi, or prisoners enduring ill-treatment by security guards in privately owned G4S prisons in South Africa. Davis elucidates that intersectionality is a framework that allows us to think about what may appear to be dramatically different transnational struggles by grouping them under a similar umbrella of struggles that can be responded to collectively²³. An example of such a collective response is when UK-based activists from the various previously mentioned interest groups staged actions at the company's annual general meeting (AGM) in London every year in the period 2012 – 2016. The diversity of participant identities and arguments presented at the AGM helped amplify pressure on a single target. A week after the shareholders meeting in 2014, the CEO of the company, Ashley Almanza, announced the company's intention not to renew the contract with the Israeli Prison Authority²⁴. The campaign continued until those contracts were eventually withdrawn.

TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENTS

From 2013 – 2016, G4S lost more than 12 contracts in Jordan, five contracts in Lebanon, and substantial investment in Kuwait, accompanied by local Stop G4S efforts in Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. Local BDS chapters or partners, who rely on volunteer activists and support from local civil society organizations, were the driving forces behind those campaigns. Shuabi explains that:

At the time, G4S's business in the Arab region was worth several times the value of its investments in Israel. More and more third parties were ending their contracts with G4S locally, leading to a domino effect that could potentially threaten G4S' business across the region. This threat, in the context of an ongoing global, multi-dimensional campaign, inevitably forced the company to calculate the figures and make a corporate decision accordingly.²⁵

Arab markets are categorized as emerging markets or developing economies, with many countries showing a relatively stable economic 'growth' since the post-Arab Spring period²⁶. With lower costs and the prospect of revenue generation in developing economies, and market growth in emerging economies, investment opportunities could be more attractive for multinational corporations than in mature markets. It is logical that corporations, like G4S, would be keen to maintain and grow their investments in the region to take advantage of these conditions. As discussed in the following paragraph, this is reflected both in terms of financial capital and human capital.

To further understand the impact of the Stop G4S campaign, it is worth comparing the campaign's strategy to other BDS campaigns targeting mega corporations. Previous successful BDS campaigns have targeted Veolia, a transnational transport, water, and waste management company that divested from the Jerusalem Light Rail (JLR) project after losing more than \$20 billion dollars' worth of contracts and investments worldwide. The seven-year-long campaign came to an end just after Kuwait excluded Veolia from two major public tenders worth \$2.25 billion USD following a successful campaign by local BDS activists. Similarly, Orange, a global telecommunication services corporation, ended its relationship with the Israeli company Partners, after six years at a point that later constituted a critical juncture in the campaign's journey. It was during the same week that BDS Egypt announced a popular boycott of Mobinil²⁷ that Orange's CEO flew into Cairo to hold a press conference declaring that the company would withdraw from Israel.

¹⁸Shuabi, Z. (2019, May 13). Personal interview via phone.

¹⁹BDSmovement.net, supra 16.

²⁰Davis, A., & Barat, F. (2016). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

²¹Ibid.

²²G4S is the largest employer in Africa, and has previously faced a wide international labor rights campaign from 2007 – 2003 due to its violations of workers' rights across the African continent.

²³Davis, supra 20. (pp. 19).

²⁴BDSmovement.net, supra 16.

²⁵Shuabi, supra 18.

²⁶World Bank. 2019. *Global Economic Prospects, January 2019: Darkening Skies*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. doi: 6-1343-4648-1-978/10.1596;

²⁷The local Orange franchise in Egypt at the time was called Mobinil.



POLICY OUTCOME

For many years, G4S repeatedly promised to withdraw from its prison contracts in Palestine, but those promises remained unfulfilled. The campaign continued despite such promises. Five years into the campaign, after the company incurred substantial losses in contracts and investments, G4S eventually announced the sale of its subsidiary and that it was no longer involved with the Israeli Prison Authority. The company sold approximately 80 percent of its investments in businesses violating Palestinian human rights²⁸. Nonetheless, G4S still maintains one major contract with the Israeli Police Academy²⁹.

For this reason, the Stop G4S campaign continues today to pressure the mother company to divest the remaining stake. While G4S's exit was celebrated by activists and organizations involved in the campaign as a victory, it seems to have weakened the momentum of the campaign. Following the announcement, campaigns against G4S continued in the Arab world, Latin America and South Africa, however, they largely faded in Europe and the United States³⁰. Nonetheless, new BDS targets emerging in Europe and North America, such as the Boycott HP campaign³¹, and confrontations against attempts to criminalize BDS³² are thought to be further reasons that have impacted the momentum of the campaign in those regions.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Despite relationships with key policy-makers, CSOs have not been able to effect favorable policy reform due to the inherent restrictions of the Lebanese political context. On the contrary, policy-makers have enacted their own laws that further limit freedom of expression and digital journalism by incorporating the latter into the criminal code. Dealing with the political authority is the greatest challenge facing CSOs.
- CSOs have been hindered in their initiatives and work due to a lack of funding for freedom of expression-related initiatives, and are thus operating to their limit. Anticipated funding from the EU is expected to open the door for more international funding for CSOs operating in this domain that will improve their work as a result.
- The control of the major traditional media outlets by political groups, government actors, and their affiliates cannot be overlooked after observing the lack of significant media coverage of freedom of expression related cases. The lack of traditional media attention hinders CSOs' efforts to raise awareness and shape the public debate around the issue. As a result, most information related to freedom of expression cases are disseminated primarily on social media and other digital media platforms.

²⁸G4S: Company Profile 2018). 2018, June 28). Corporate Watch. Retrieved May, 17 2019, from <https://corporatewatch.org/g4s-company-profile2018-/>

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Shuabi, *supra* 18.

³¹BDSmovement.net (2019). "Boycott HP" [online]. Available at: <https://bdsmovement.net/boycott-hp> [Accessed 17 May 2019].

³²The Editorial Board. (2018, December 18). Curbing Speech in the Name of Helping Israel. The New York Times. Retrieved May 2019, 17, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/2018/opinion/editorials/israel-bds.html>; BDSmovement.net (2019). "The Right to Boycott" [online]. Available at: <https://bdsmovement.net/right-to-boycott> [Accessed 17 May 2019].

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BDS</i>	<i>Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement</i>
<i>BNC</i>	<i>BDS National Committee</i>
<i>G4S</i>	<i>Group 4 Securicor</i>
<i>HP</i>	<i>Hewlett Packard</i>
<i>JLR</i>	<i>Jerusalem Light Rail</i>
<i>UN</i>	<i>United Nations</i>
<i>UNICEF</i>	<i>United Nations Children's Fund</i>

INTERVIEWS

Michael Deas. (2019, May 10). Former International Campaigns Coordinator at the BNC. Personal communication.

Zaid Al Shaubi (2019, May 13). Former Arab World Campaigns Coordinator at the BNC. Phone interview.

BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid- 2018, the “Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World” program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project “Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making”. This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project’s goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media’s expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) is an independent, research-based, policy oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab region. The Institute is committed to expanding and deepening knowledge production and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society actors, and policy makers.

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