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Finland continues to foster the occupation

Israel is arguably the most militarised state in the world, with a sizable private military industry fully intertwined with the Israeli army, police and intelligence agencies, all of which are involved in blatantly criminal activities, writes Bruno Jäntti.

DESPITE an exceptional public outcry by leading Finnish public figures, the Ministry of Defence of Finland (MDF) intends to proceed with its controversial collaboration with Israeli arms companies deeply involved in Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territories. Finland is turning to Israel for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or "drones", in a deal worth more than 17 million euros.

ON 10 OCTOBER last year, Helsingin Sanomat published in its Sunday edition a full page article titled "Israel, Our Brother-in-arms". Reaching the newspaper's one million-strong Sunday circulation, the article was the most prominent of many reports dealing with Finland's arms trade with Israel. Among the reasons for the article was a petition of more than a hundred dignitaries from the arts, sciences and politics calling for an immediate halt to Finnish-Israeli arms trade and military technology cooperation in all forms.

DURING the months that followed, the number of signatories grew from 100 to more than 250. Among those insisting on a cessation of all forms of military cooperation with Israel are foreign minister **Erkki Tuomioja**, world-renowned expert on international law **Martti Koskenniemi** and the most distinguished Finnish filmmaker of all time, **Aki Kaurismäki**. They were joined by more than 40 professors, a number of Finlandia Prize winners, Finnish MEPs and MPs,

stage and film directors, actors, writers and scholars. The petition encompasses an impressive and exhaustive array of who's who in Finnish intellectual society.

MOREOVER, earlier this month, the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) issued a call for "an immediate and comprehensive military embargo on Israel" similar to the one imposed on apartheid South Africa. The call, which marked the seventh

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anniversary of the still unenforced International Court of Justice decision declaring Israel's wall in the West Bank illegal, was endorsed by Nobel Peace Prize winners Archbishop **Desmond Tutu**, **Mairead Maguire**, **Betty Williams** and **Adolfo Perez Esquivel**. It has also been endorsed by the European Network Against Arms Trade.

IN JUNE, the Ministry of Defense announced that it had chosen the two finalists in a UAV tender worth more than 17 million euros for 30-45 unmanned systems. Both finalists are Israeli military technology manufacturers, and the winner will be announced in November.

THE COMPANIES competing for the Finnish UAV contract are Bluebird Aero Systems

and Aeronautics Defense Systems. Both BlueBird and Aeronautics are candid and vocal about their partnership with the Israeli military as this is what the companies regard as a decisive advantage over their competitors in the multi-billion-euro international arms markets.

ON ITS website, a BlueBird video commercial states: "BlueBird's mini-electrical UASs [Unmanned Aerial Systems] are combat-proven, flying with the Israeli Air

Force, Israeli MOD [Ministry of Defense], US Special Forces and others while continually demonstrating reliable performance and outstanding results."

AMONG the many links between Bluebird and the criminal actions of the Israeli military, Bluebird's UAVs were used in air strike executions perpetrated in Gaza by the Israeli Air Force, according to the watchdog group Who Profits?

AS FOR "outstanding results" and "reliable performance," the Israeli military killed at least 87 civilians in more than 40 UAV attacks during the three-week-long assault on Gaza that began on 27 December 2008, according to a June 2009 report by Human Rights Watch.

AERONAUTICS' UAVs were also reportedly used during Israel's three week-long assault on the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, Aeronautics is one of the companies that have created a perimeter-control system for the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. The company is also developing hi-tech systems with military applications, such as perimeter control radar systems and bomb fuzes.

AERONAUTICS also holds shares in Controp Precision Technologies, which has sold electro-optical intrusion detection systems for the illegal wall Israel has built inside the occupied West Bank. Controp runs a joint project with the off-road utility vehicle manufacturer Tomcar and the private Israeli military powerhouse Elbit Systems, developing a UAV for military purposes and selling cameras for UAVs used by the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

FINLAND'S decision to conduct arms trade with the very companies that are both complicit in the occupation and benefit greatly from it is extremely problematic and hypocritical in light of agreements such as the Arms Trade Treaty, which has been pushed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, and which would make it illegal to trade arms with countries that violate human rights. Other reasons to desist include EU instruments such as the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports and

the recognition by the Finnish government that Israel has no legal entitlement to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

THE ORGANISATION represented by this writer has debated MDF officials on the specific question of the Finnish-Israeli arms trade. The responses from the MDF on this issue have been as predictable as they have been disappointing. When debating with **Jouko Tuloisela**, a high official from the MDF, a rather telling exchange took place. First, I spelled out in depth a number of blatant human rights violations, including direct attacks on civilians, that the very Israeli companies that Finland is trading military technology with are deeply involved in. Then, a question from the floor requested that Tuloisela explain how Finland could conduct trade with companies that are demonstrably taking part in, and benefiting lucratively from, flagrant human rights violations. Tuloisela answered: "Well, of course the question could be put the other way, namely why would Finland exclude these companies from bidding?"

IT REMAINS largely unknown to observers outside the MDF whether it is genuinely unable to comprehend why the Finnish-Israeli arms trade creates a series of grave credibility problems for Finland.

THE PREVIOUS Finnish-Israeli military technology deal was struck two years ago when the MDF purchased communications systems from Tadiran Communications, a subsidiary of Elbit Systems. The MDF sealed the deal while a number of European power players – including the Deutsche Bank, Sweden's biggest pension fund, Danske Bank and a Norwegian pension fund – publicly cut their ties with Elbit. At the time the Norwegian Finance Minister **Kristin Halvorsen** said: "We do not wish to fund companies that so directly contribute to violations of

international humanitarian law."

ISRAEL is investing extraordinary resources in military exports and, as a result, a stunning 80 per cent of Israel's military production is exported to foreign markets. Last year, Israel exported military equipment worth more than 5.1 billion euros. The defence budget of Finland, by comparison, is approximately 2.7 billion euros. Therefore, the total value of military exports from Israel is roughly twice the defense budget of Finland – despite Israel's GDP being smaller than that of Finland. Furthermore, Israel's military budget is 3.5 times that of Finland.

ISRAEL is arguably the most militarised state in the world, with a sizable private military industry fully intertwined with the Israeli army, police and intelligence agencies, all of which are involved in blatantly criminal activities.

THE DECISION of Finnish policy makers to persistently offer new military contracts to Israel is part of the legitimisation of Israeli illegalities and a culture of unaccountability, which are characteristic of the EU and US approach towards Israel. The military trade with Israel doesn't quite contribute to the ending of the conflict, either, although this is the official aim of the Finnish government's Middle East policy.

AS THE TOTAL value of the arms trade between Finland and Israel approaches 200 million euros, the continuing military transactions have imposed collective responsibility and therefore complicity on Finnish taxpayers. The links between the Finnish taxpayer to the longest illegal and ongoing military occupation in the post-Second World War era will be sealed by the UAV contract. At what exact point Finnish decision-makers start to pay heed to public opposition regarding the military trade with Israel remains to be seen.