



# Palestine Support Network Australia

## OPEN LETTER TO THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTORS SERVICE REGARDING JOINT VENTURE WITH ELBIT

June 2016

We the undersigned, strongly object to the Royal Flying Doctors Service involvement with the Israeli arms manufacturer, Elbit Systems.

We understand that the RFDS has entered into a joint initiative with Elbit Systems of Australia (ELSA) for the supply of an \$18 million training centre featuring a Beechcraft King Air B200 flight simulator to be used for training for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), South Eastern Section.

We further understand that this facility will be operated exclusively by Elbit Systems who will establish the training center, provide ongoing maintenance, and control its operation, as well as the supply of trainers and training services to local, national and international clients.

**We are gravely concerned that a humanitarian medical organisation such as the Royal Flying Doctors Service would partner with an arms manufacturer which has been internationally recognized as being complicit in numerous ongoing and serious violations of international human rights law.**

Elbit Systems, (the parent company of Elbit Systems Australia), is a major supplier of weapons worldwide and to the Israeli military. This company is one of the world's most aggressive promoters of the use of drones in warfare as well as in population control and it is directly involved in Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian people in the Occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Eighty-five percent of the drones used by the Israeli military are manufactured by Elbit. Elbit markets its equipment based on the fact that it has been battle tested. For example, the Elbit website advertises that the Hermes 450 drone is the "[backbone of Israel's UAS fleet](#)", and also that their weapons are [combat proven](#)<sup>i</sup>.

Seventy-three members of the European Parliament have [publicly called](#)<sup>ii</sup> for the European Union (EU) not to grant research and development funds to Israeli arms manufacturers, including Elbit. Elbit Systems is one of Israel's biggest military companies and a major producer of drones, weapons and other technology that is a key part of Israel's military apparatus. Beyond this, Elbit's technologies have been developed during the course of Israel's military actions that have been severely condemned by EU member states and provoked mass demonstrations throughout Europe.

Elbit has been the target for [global divestment](#)<sup>iii</sup> and boycott campaigns and many major superannuation and pension funds have [divested](#)<sup>iv</sup> from the company. For example, in September 2009, the [Norwegian Government Pension Fund](#) sold its \$5.4 million holding in Elbit Systems Ltd. due to the company's supply of systems for the Annexation Wall<sup>v</sup>. Norway's Minister of Finance commented on the divestment by saying that Norway do not wish to fund companies that "so directly contribute to violations of international humanitarian law."



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## **Use of Elbit drones and white phosphorus weapons in Gaza**

Elbit's 7.5 Skylark mini-UAV, has been used by Israeli Army since 2008. Elbit Hermes drones were one of the two main unpowered aircraft used to attack civilians in Gaza during Israel's 2009 Operation Cast Lead offensive which killed over 1,400 Palestinians, [according to the Human Rights Watch \(HRW\) report](#)<sup>vi</sup>.

Gaza was subject to military attack by Israel again in 2012 and then also in 2014 with Operation Protective Edge, where [Elbit Skylark drones](#) were heavily used for support of ground military actions along with Hermes 450s and 900s<sup>vii</sup>. The subsequent UN commission of inquiry stated that "the scale of the devastation was unprecedented" and it counted 2,251 Palestinian deaths and 18,000 homes destroyed.

Elbit's 2010 Annual Report disclosed that a subsidiary of the company produces white phosphorus ammunition. According to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the deployment of white phosphorus against humans is illegal and constitutes a war crime. In the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead, the International Committee of the Red Cross confirmed the use of [white phosphorus](#) bombs in Israel's attacks on Gaza<sup>viii</sup>.

During and after the military aggression on Gaza in July/August 2014, Elbit's shares rose 6.6%.

## **Use of Elbit's military hardware in the West Bank**

Elbit provides electronics for the Separation Wall, which stretches for hundreds of kilometers through the Occupied West Bank, which has taken land and water resources and cut off hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from adjacent villages whilst enclosing land which is used by illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Wall was [declared illegal](#) under international law by the International Court of Justice in 2004<sup>ix</sup>.

## **Elbit's complicity in this ongoing unjust and illegal operation of the wall means it is acting contrary to international law.**

The Elbit Skylark drone has been used extensively for surveillance throughout the Occupied West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem for years and drones such as these are used to control every facet of the lives of Palestinian civilians. Most recently Skylark drones were instrumental in the extensive house arrests by the Israeli military throughout the West Bank from 2014. [Amnesty International reported](#) that 2,500 Palestinians, including hundreds of children were arrested in 2015-2016, and significantly increased their use of administrative detention<sup>x</sup>.

To conclude, in light of the fact that Elbit Systems supports and profits from Israeli violations of international law and is primarily an arms manufacturer, we are gravely concerned that the RFDS has embarked on a joint venture with this company. We do not believe that the Royal Flying Doctors Service, with its values of dedication and integrity in improving health outcomes and saving lives, can ethically partner with a company whose primary business is the business of war, dispossession and subjugation.



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We see this partnership as one which will irrevocably damage the good reputation and status of the RFDS and one which will seriously compromise the good work that the RFDS engages in.

We call on the RFDS to immediately reconsider its involvement with Elbit Systems.

## **Palestine Support Network Australia (PSNA)**

[AFOPA](#) - Australian Friends of Palestine Association

[AFP](#) - Australians for Palestine

[APPA](#) - Australian Palestinians Professional Association

[CJPP](#) - The Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine

[FOH](#) - Friends of Hebron

[JAO](#) - Jews Against the Occupation

Palestinian Workers Club

with

[APAN](#) – Australian Palestine Advocacy Network

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.elbitsystems.com/elbitmain/area-in2.asp?parent=3&num=32&num2=32>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.eccpalestine.org/73-members-of-the-european-parliament-call-on-the-eu-to-stop-its-support-to-israeli-military-companies/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://wedivest.org/learn-more/elbit/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://investigate.afsc.org/company/elbit-systems-ltd>

<sup>v</sup> <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/complicit-companies.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/06/30/precisely-wrong/gaza-civilians-killed-israeli-drone-launched-missiles>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://corporatewatch.org/company-profiles/elbit>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/weapons-interview-170109.htm>

<sup>ix</sup> <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=4&p3=6>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/report-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>