

# Resource Rights: the Separation Wall, Elbit, & TIAA-CREF

Frequently Asked Questions  
(FAQs) & Answers



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## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Answers Concerning the Separation Wall in Israel-Palestine, Elbit Systems, TIAA-CREF and Resource Rights

Israel is currently building a Separation Wall in the West Bank that seizes land and water in Palestine and severely impacts food production. It is vital for us in the United States to understand our responsibility through our tax dollars (President Obama's 2012 budget seeks over \$3 billion in military aid to Israel). These U.S. dollars provide substantial funding to enable and sustain Israel's occupation and the ongoing grab of Palestinian land and water resources. As part of our mission to promote resource rights, **Grassroots International invites you to join with us in a nationwide campaign to ask TIAA-CREF to divest from Elbit Systems Ltd.**, which is a major corporation involved in the construction of the Wall. This FAQ document explains more about this effort.

### Who We Are

**Grassroots International** works to create a just and sustainable world by building alliances with progressive movements, providing grants to our Global South partners and joining them in advocating for social change. Our primary focus is on Resource Rights as human rights and nourishing the political struggle necessary to achieve these rights.

### Resource Rights

are the right to (including access to and control of) the natural resources on which life and livelihoods are based, especially land, water, food, and seeds. Grassroots views resource rights as critical for human dignity, livelihood and survival; they are fundamental to realizing universal human rights.



# What is this campaign about?



“As a college professor with a retirement fund managed by TIAA-CREF, I see this campaign as a concrete way to address the policies of the Occupation with my colleagues. By focusing on Elbit and TIAA-CREF, we can make a small but measurable difference. It puts us on the road toward change. After all these years, this is the most important thing we can do.”

– Dan Connell, journalist, photographer, and founder of Grassroots International

“If one came and stole your land, this is repression. This is not simply the repression of an individual, or the repression of women, but repression of the whole society ...This is violence. This is not simple violence, but a violence that remains over the years and drags down the mother, children, and men.”

– Fatima Brajiya, mother of five in her 60s and Stop the Wall activist from Al Ma'sara, Bethlehem, West Bank.

## What are the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and what is the nature of the human and resource right violations occurring there presently?

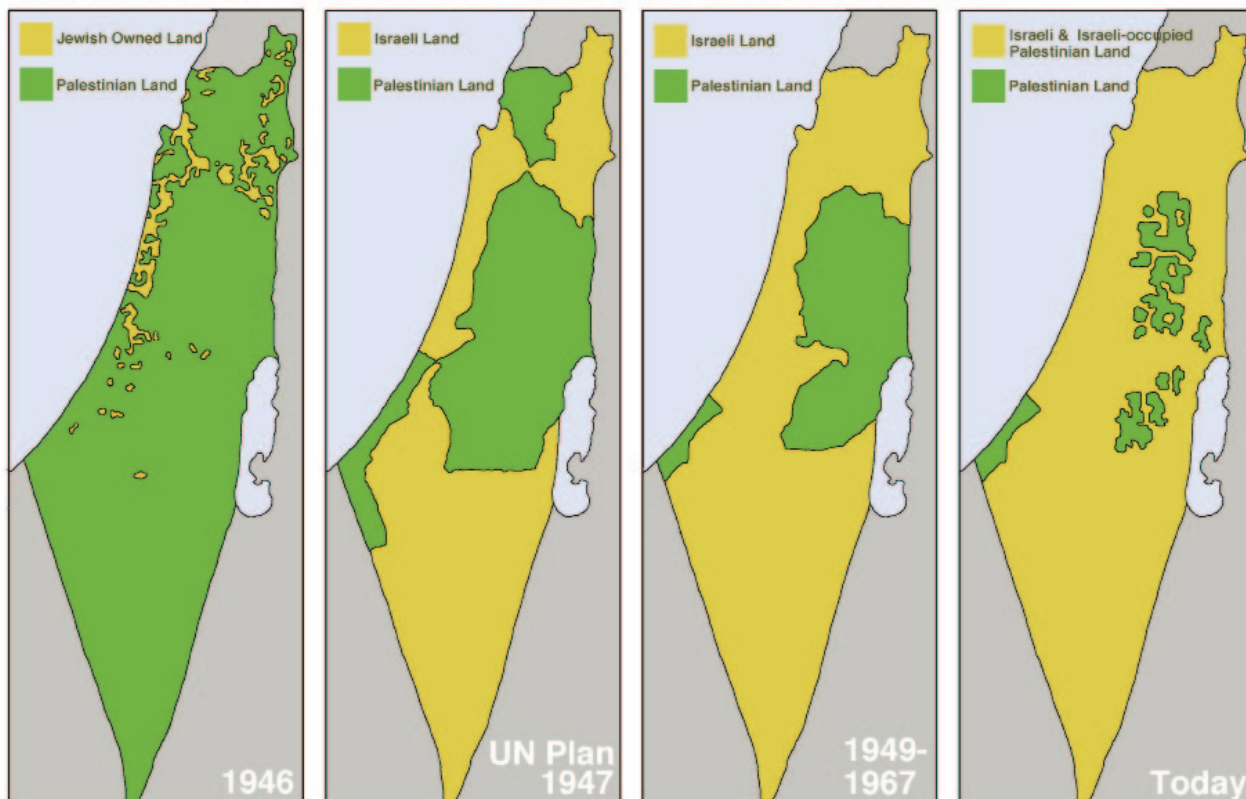
The occupied Palestinian territories (also known as the oPt or Palestine) comprise land occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The oPt are composed of two discontinuous regions: the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (2178 square miles of land and 85 square miles of water networks as well as the northwest quarter of the Dead Sea), and the Gaza Strip (139 square miles with access to the Mediterranean Sea).

As a result of the occupation, Palestinian people do not have control of and lack access to both an adequate supply of water and to fertile land in a region whose economy has historically been agricultural.



“Elements of the Israeli occupation constitute forms of colonialism and of apartheid, which are contrary to international law.” – John Dugard, United Nations Special Rapporteur for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, 2001–2008.

### Palestinian Loss of Land 1946 to Present



Map courtesy of Anna Baltzer





“It reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. I have seen the humiliation of the Palestinians at checkpoints and road-blocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about. Many South Africans are beginning to recognize the parallels to what we went through.” – Archbishop Desmond Tutu

## How long has Grassroots International been working to support human rights in the Middle East?

Grassroots International’s work in the oPt began in 1986, growing out of work the organization had done since its founding in 1983 with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon after Israel’s invasion in 1982. In the mid-1980s, the program grew to include partners in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and in 2006, it expanded to include a partner in Israel.



## How does Grassroots International’s Middle East Program support resource rights?

Resource Rights are economic and social rights grounded in local control of, and access to, natural resources such as land, water, food and genetic material (e.g., seed stocks) that are fundamental to sustaining rural livelihoods, agro-biodiversity, and economic and social justice.



Our strategy emerges from nearly 30 years of working with social movements in the Global South and with our Northern allies. We believe that solutions to injustice and poverty come through increased grassroots power and sustainable community-based development, and these are best achieved through coalitions of powerful social movements.

As executive director Nikhil Aziz notes, “Grassroots International understands the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, at its very core, to be a conflict over land and water. It is a conflict between those fighting for human rights and those fighting to deny them. Such conflicts exist in many parts of the world, and have often more to do with unjust and unequal resource access, ownership and control rather than the particular religion or language of the sides involved.”

The right to, and control of these resources is critical for achieving Palestinian self-determination, and for an enduring and just peace. Under occupation, Palestinians face a constant forfeiture of resources as a result of confiscation of their land and water and expansion of Israeli settlements and roads. The construction of the Separation Wall enables Israel to unilaterally define future borders, limit Palestinian movement through checkpoints and roadblocks, and deny them access to their land and water.

Through partnerships with organizations in the oPt and Israel, Grassroots International supports community-based organizations providing essential services and advancing rights to land, water and food. Through our work with allies and partners we facilitate international linkages to support and amplify the Palestinian struggle for resource rights and toward peace with justice.





## Why does Grassroots International want to focus on TIAA-CREF and their investments in Elbit?

The day-to-day struggle in Palestine is very much about land and water, which are critical to self-determination and sovereignty. One of the biggest impediments to Palestinian access to fresh water and land is the Separation Wall being built by the defense contractor Elbit. Our Palestinian partners have asked for our support in their struggle to secure their resource and human rights. They have called for this divestment campaign to bring awareness to the resource and human rights violations that the Separation Wall creates in their daily lives.





# What is the "Separation Wall"?



The Wall in the West Bank poses a great threat to the Palestinian struggle for survival on their land, and ultimately, their self-determination. The Wall takes on many different forms. In some places, it is a solid concrete structure eight meters (26-plus feet) high with armed sniper towers embedded every 300 meters. In other places, it is a network of obstacles made up of trenches that measure up to four meters deep, razor wire, electrified fences, and military roads. In addition, buffer zones extend from 30 to 100 meters on the Palestinian side—complete with sensors, expanded trenches, and military patrol roads.

The Wall's construction, which officially began in 2002, was declared illegal under international law at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the United Nations Security Council. Both the ICJ and UN reiterated the illegality of Israel's settlement policies and the occupation as a whole. This ruling has done nothing to stall the Wall's construction, nor the adverse path of destruction left in its wake or the increasing Israeli settlements.

"I was living safe in my village, my home, my farm and one night someone knocked on the door of my house...it was the Israeli army who gave me a paper saying that they wanted to confiscate my land to build the wall. The name of the land is Sandyanah, it was planted with olive trees. It was not only me from the village that received this notice. They put the whole village under curfew and they started to uproot the olive trees and to build the wall in my land. They stole my place of safety and they took the food of my family, and they made me a refugee for the second time in my life, as I am originally from what became Israel. I came to Tulkarem camp as a refugee."

– Asmail Abdullah, from Foron village in the Tulkarem district

## How does the Separation Wall contribute to segregation and resource rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories?

The Wall does not follow the 1967 Green Line, the border between the West Bank/East Jerusalem and Israel. Instead the Wall often cuts deep into the West Bank, expanding Israel's appropriation of Palestinian land and water resources. When completed, the Wall will de facto annex nearly half of the West Bank, isolating Palestinian communities into separated and militarized ghettos.

The Wall is not a new concept—since 1994 a similar barrier and its surrounding buffer zones have closed off the Gaza Strip. Today, this structure is an integral part of maintaining the siege that has essentially cut Gaza off from the rest of the world since 2006.

The path of the Wall snakes through the occupied West Bank, enveloping Israeli settlements and caging off built-up Palestinian areas into enclaves. Some Palestinian cities and towns are totally surrounded, imprisoning the residents and denying them access to their agricultural lands, water resources, markets, schools, hospitals, and other social connections. Poverty has skyrocketed due to loss of income as a result of inaccessible resources and restricted movement.

The Wall in East Jerusalem encircles the city and the ring of Israeli settlements around it, isolating East Jerusalem from the West Bank. At the same time, the eastern part of the Wall effectively annexes most of the Jordan Valley's rich farmland and the Jordan River along the Jordanian border—ensuring that Israel maintains total control of all international borders in the case of any future Palestinian state, and of Palestinians' major source of water.



Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein speaks out against the Wall and the occupation.  
Photo courtesy of Kelly Van Pelt.



## How does the Separation Wall impact Palestinians' land and water usage?

One of the biggest impediments to Palestinian access to fresh water and land is the Separation Wall. In the first phase alone, the Wall's construction destroyed nearly 12 miles of water networks, uprooted more than 100,000 olive and citrus trees, and cut off Palestinian access to the Western Aquifer—even though their right to access it is supported by international law.

In the West Bank, thousands of hectares of fertile land and over 37 wells lie between the Wall and the Green Line, virtually inaccessible to Palestinians. Communities affected by the Wall are facing severe challenges to their survival as the Wall takes on various forms in different areas—all of which result in an absolute gridlock. The Israeli seizure of alleged “state land” for this project has led to the confiscation of land belonging to hundreds of Palestinian farmers and herders. Though Palestinians are established landowners, Israeli officials do not recognize their ownership documents, allowing continued land confiscation. An Israeli survey of the West Bank determined that more than 25 percent of the West Bank was “uncertain,” and thus eligible for designation as (Israeli) state land.



“The Wall affects Palestinian life and land; it doesn’t only devour our land but also devours all the efforts made to cultivate our olive trees over generations. No one can imagine the daily suffering of the Palestinian people caused by the Apartheid Wall and the military checkpoints...We’re olive farmers. It is very difficult now to survive on the olive oil we produce after 95 percent of our land was confiscated.” – Aisha Mahmoud, 50-year-old farmer, mother of five children, and member of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, Faraon village in Tulkarem

“The current route of the wall will make freedom for Palestinians impossible by cutting deeply into Palestinian land, separating people from work, church, family and their own land. Our church believes in bridges, not walls; trust, not fear; dialogue for justice and peace, not more reason for division.” – Rev. Munib Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land

# Who is Elbit?



Elbit Systems Ltd. is Israel's largest arms manufacturer and one of the world's largest security and defense electronics manufacturers. Elbit specializes in military electronics, surveillance systems, and unmanned air vehicles (UAVs or drones). Elbit also has the contract to build the Separation Wall in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and their American subsidiary, Kollsman Inc., won a contract for building the U.S.-Mexico border wall. Elbit is a TIAA-CREF investment valued at \$1,689,000 (as of March 31, 2010).

## **How does Elbit profit from human and resource rights violations in the Israeli occupation of Palestine?**

Elbit surveillance technology is used extensively to reinforce the Separation Wall in the form of their Lorros surveillance cameras, unmanned ground vehicles, and the TORCH surveillance system. In addition, the Elbit-manufactured Hermes 450 drones have been responsible for not only the surveillance of, but also attacks and death of Palestinian civilians since 2006. The sale and use of these weapons to control the oPt contribute significantly to Elbit's profits.

“Walls built in many parts of the world represent barbaric attacks against humanity and cause deep wounds to Mother Earth. This is true for those living on the U.S.-Mexico border and for those in Palestine. Both Walls divide border communities and increase human rights violations—and Elbit is profiting from both Walls. For this reason, we, the campesinos and migrant agricultural workers of the U.S.-Mexico border are in solidarity with the people of Palestine and all the peoples fighting today against the atrocities of Walls.” – Carlos Marentes, Sr., Border Agricultural Workers Project, member of the Via Campesina



Elbit's equipment is also used in the impenetrable walls surrounding the Gaza Strip—effectively denying the 1.5 million Palestinians living there access to the outside world.

## How will human and resource rights be protected if divestment in Elbit occurs?

Elbit's role in the violation of human and resource rights in the oPt are exemplified through Israel's use of their weapons and military equipment upon the civilian Palestinian population. Divestment from Elbit is an important step in ending the perpetuation of the Separation Wall. Divestment from Elbit will also bring international awareness to the human and resource rights violations occurring in the oPt—including attacks on Palestinian civilians by Hermes drone missiles. The psychological terror induced upon Palestinian civilians is immeasurable as Elbit drones patrol the skies over the oPt at night.

“Elbit supplies the Israeli army with killer drones. These are unmanned vehicles which have been aptly described as ‘the workhorse’ of the Israeli army. These drones carry sensors so precise that they enable a drone operator to read a license plate number and determine whether a person on the ground is carrying a weapon. And yet time and again the drones have been involved in the killing of civilians in Gaza, Lebanon, and elsewhere.”

— Phyllis Bennis, Institute for Policy Studies

“No company is more deeply embedded in Israel's brutal architecture, occupation and segregation than Elbit.”

— Naomi Klein, author of *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*



# Who is TIAA-CREF?

TIAA (Teachers Insurance and Annuity) and CREF (College Retirement Equities Fund) are two closely related companies. TIAA-CREF provides financial services to Americans in the academic, medical, cultural and research fields, and with over \$400 billion in total assets, is one of the largest retirement systems in the world. TIAA-CREF claims to be a socially responsible investor and, in fact, has cited human rights violations in the Sudan for divesting assets it has held. Yet it continues to invest in businesses that profit from human and resource rights violations in the oPt.

## **How is TIAA-CREF profiting from human rights violations, especially those connected to forced segregation and destruction of resources by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories?**

In addition to Elbit, TIAA-CREF investments include Caterpillar, Veolia, Northrop Grumman, and Motorola. All of these corporations directly profit from either product sales or services that are fundamental to the continued occupation by Israel of the oPt.

## **What other organizations are working on TIAA-CREF divestment campaigns?**

Among others, Jewish Voice for Peace and the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation are actively working on TIAA-CREF divestment campaigns and have gained tremendous support since they began in June 2010 and July 2007, respectively.



Graphic: Wikipedia

“We are asking TIAA-CREF, one of the largest financial services in the United States, to stop investing in Elbit and other companies that profit from the Israeli occupation. Why? In the case of Elbit, because it profits from the construction and operation of the Wall that Israel has built inside the West Bank, effectively robbing Palestinians of their land, separating Palestinian farmers from their fields, and dividing Palestinian communities. We believe that profiting from these injustices is simply wrong.” – Sydney Levy, Jewish Voice for Peace



## **Have divestment efforts targeting TIAA-CREF or the corporations mentioned above worked and have they already divested from some companies that profit from the Israeli occupation?**

Yes. Divestment efforts—movements to push for a withdrawal of investments from corporations or governments that violate human rights—have been showing effective results. Veolia has been forced to sell its shares of Jerusalem Light Rail which support a segregation-based transportation system in the oPt. Celebrated author and social justice activist Naomi Klein points out that “Israel’s small size and heavy reliance on international trade makes it the perfect candidate for a divestment strategy. Targeted campaigns can have an immediate impact and already have the attention of Israeli policy makers.”

In 2010 TIAA-CREF was the first large U.S. financial firm to listen to human rights organizations and divest from a group of Asian energy companies in the Sudan. Divestment has put pressure on the central government in Khartoum vis-à-vis their human rights violations.



“For much of my life I have worked with farmers and been a farmer. The Wall separates farmers from their land and water resources, while the U.S. looks the other way. That’s why it’s so important for U.S. citizens to speak out against companies like Elbit and TIAA-CREF that profit from the illegal construction of the Wall. Signing a petition is an easy and effective way to take action and refuse to be a part of immoral land and water grabs. If enough of us take action, it can really make a difference.”

– Louise Bowditch,  
Grassroots International  
donor and activist

# What can I do?

## How can I support this divestment campaign?

TIAA-CREF claims to be socially responsible, yet invests the retirement savings for millions of Americans in Elbit, a corporation that enables and profits from occupation and human rights violations.

**If you have retirement funds invested in TIAA-CREF, you have the power to influence where that money goes.** Follow the instructions in our [Call to Action](#) to ask TIAA-CREF to divest its funds from the Elbit Systems Ltd., and ask your colleagues, friends, family, and educational institutions to do the same.

## What can I do if I don't have investments in TIAA-CREF?

There are many other ways to lend your support to this campaign:

1. Pass the word on to your friends and family—ask them if they have funds invested in TIAA-CREF, and if so, ask them to send a message to TIAA-CREF using our [Call to Action](#).
2. [Sign the petition](#) asking TIAA-CREF to divest from Elbit (open to anyone even if you don't have personal investments there).
3. Raise awareness on the issue—you can conduct an educational workshop for people in your community, repost our articles and blog entries to other websites or social networks, write letters to the editor about this issue, and more. Check out resources for these types of actions on the Grassroots International website: [www.GrassrootsOnline.org](http://www.GrassrootsOnline.org).



“Here in Boston, we recognize that divestment is an important strategy for educating, mobilizing and changing both business and governmental policy. In this case it empowers masses of participants to demand adherence to international law and human rights in ending the occupation and working for a just peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.”  
— Jean Entine, Grassroots International Board Member and TIAA-CREF divestment participant





## What else can I do to support human and resource rights in the occupied Palestinian territories?

You can support this work by offering activist and financial support. [Join our e-advocacy list](#) to receive regular updates on Resource Rights work around the world, including action alerts.

[Your financial support](#) for Grassroots International and our Middle East Program helps women, family farmers and human rights activists in the oPt. Through partnerships with organizations in the oPt and Israel, Grassroots International supports community-based organizations providing essential services and advancing rights to land, water and food. And working with allies and partners, we facilitate international linkages to support and amplify the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and peace with justice.

## What does Grassroots International consider a successful outcome to this divestment campaign?

Grassroots International's primary focus in this effort is to support rights to land, water, and food for all people in the region, particularly those in the shadow of the Separation Wall. Specifically, we aim to:

Create public spaces for dialogue on Palestinian resource rights;

Share the on-the-ground realities of our partners in the oPt;

Strengthen links between movements fighting for human rights in the oPt, movements working on migrant rights who are impacted by the U.S.-Mexico border wall and other global barriers, and movements working towards rights to land, water, and food more broadly;

Add to broader pressure that will ultimately push TIAA-CREF to divest from Elbit Systems!



“In sync with Grassroots International’s mission to defend Resource Rights as Human Rights, a successful outcome of our participation in the targeted divestment campaign against Elbit Systems Ltd. will be to enhance the overall campaign by highlighting how the Separation Wall violates human rights to land, water and food in the oPt.”  
– Hayat Imam, Grassroots International Board Member



# (Online) Links to other FAQs and Resources

Grassroots International's "Divest from Elbit" resource page (including our call to action and educational materials)

## **TIAA-CREF**

Jewish Voice for Peace's fact sheet on TIAA-CREF

## **ELBIT**

Jewish Voice for Peace's fact sheet on Elbit

Link to Shock Doctrine website (Naomi Klein book with more information about Elbit)

Naomi Klein article including information about Elbit

Stop the Wall's fact sheet about Elbit

Maps of the Separation Wall

## **Resource Rights & the oPt**

Amnesty International report – Troubled Waters: Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water

Grassroots International Resource Rights video

## **Additional Information on Human Rights & the oPt**

B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

Human Rights Watch report – Separate and Unequal: Israel's Discriminatory Treatment of Palestinians in the oPt

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: occupied Palestinian territories

## **Additional organizations working on divestment and other similar campaigns**

Anglican Consultative Council (Approved divestment June 2005)

Anglican Peace and Justice Network (Recommended divestment September 2004)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Jewish Voice for Peace

Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth (December 2009)

New England Conference, United Methodist Church (Approved divestment resolution June 2005)

Presbyterian Church U.S.A.'s fact sheet on The Wall (Passed divestment resolution July 2004)

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center (A Nonviolent Response to the Occupation: A Call for Morally Responsible Investment, 2005)

United Church of Christ (25th General Synod approved divestment July 2005)

US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation

World Council of Churches (Approved divestment February 2005)

