



STOP G4S

A coalition of groups and individuals
opposed to G4S and its various unlawful
activities and human rights abuses

Stop G4S: <http://stopg4s.net/contact>

Please use or adapt this letter to write to your local or regional BBC or to head office. Some contact details are available at <http://faq.external.bbc.co.uk/questions/contact/>

Please alert anti-racist campaigns, Palestine Solidarity Campaign branches, NUJ branches and Trades Union Councils.

BBC – Stop G4S from bidding now!

Over the last 6 weeks, G4S has hardly been out of the news. Shareholders fury at the AGM was reported in the FT[1], Telegraph[2], Guardian[3], This is Money[4]... highlighting complicity with Israeli violations of human rights and international law alongside Olympic incompetence and the £16m payout to former CEO Nick Buckles. The BBC[5] and ITV[6] covered the Inquest into the death of Jimmy Mubenga as a result of restraint by G4S guards on board a deportation flight. The Crown Prosecution Service will now reconsider charges against individual guards, and potentially G4S itself could be charged with corporate manslaughter as the company had been warned of the dangers of “positional asphyxia”[7]. The scandal of G4S asylum housing is public knowledge[8]. Fraudulent payments for electronic tagging have provoked a referral to the Serious Fraud Office after G4S refused to participate in a voluntary audit[9]. The latest outrageous fiasco is hilarious, but the rest of the G4S saga is not remotely funny.

But there's one story the BBC has managed to suppress. G4S is almost certainly bidding for an £80m contract for security guarding across the entire BBC estate. The BBC is saying nothing. First the corporation ignored an open letter[10] signed by prominent artists and Palestinian intellectuals calling on them to exclude G4S, as they are legally entitled to do. Then the BBC declined to name the companies bidding for their contract, when responding to a straightforward Freedom of Information request.[see Timeline below] Next they failed to supply their own Internal Review of the decision within their own declared time limit. No-one knows if the Review was carried out or binned. Now a complaint has gone to the Information Commissioner.

If G4S is bidding for this contract, that is news and the public is entitled to comment. If G4S is not bidding, that is also news and we can breathe a small sigh of relief. The BBC is a public corporation committed to transparency. On its Freedom of Information Act website[11] it proclaims "As a publicly funded organisation, the BBC is fully committed to meeting both the spirit and the letter of the Act." Surely the BBC can answer a simple question complying with its own procedures on Freedom of Information?

It is virtually certain that the world's largest security company is seeking this contract. They already supply security guards for the prestigious Media City in Salford, a contract awarded in 2010. Why wouldn't G4S put in a bid?

G4S is guilty of grave misconduct on any reasonable interpretation of the term. We call on the BBC to take note of its own news coverage, and the wider media focus on successive G4S scandals, and use its discretion under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 to exclude G4S from bidding on grounds of grave misconduct.

We will make our concerns known to our local, regional, and national BBC offices.

Yours,

Notes

- 1 <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7f87bfa8-ceba-11e2-8e16-00144feab7de.html#axzz2Z9VlkqsB>
- 2 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/supportservices/10104678/G4S-annual-meeting-stormed-by-protesters.html>
- 3 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2013/jun/06/israel-prison-contracts-g4s-agm>
- 4 <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/markets/article-2337107/Investors-rage-loser-G4S-protest-riddled-AGM-24-refuse-pay-report.html>
- 5 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23246056>
- 6 <http://www.itv.com/news/story/2013-07-09/jimmy-mubenga-deportation-man-unlawfully-killed/>
- 7 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/mar/16/mubenga-g4s-face-charges-death>
- 8 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/john-grayson/g4s-asylum-housing-fiasco-descends-into-farce>
- 9 <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/security-firm-g4s-charged-for-tagging-the-dead-8703277.html>
- 10 <http://www.stopg4s.net/node/71>
- 11 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/foi/>

Timeline

The original Freedom of Information request, submitted on 28 April 2013, asked for the names of all companies which have submitted a tender or request to participate in the security guarding contract as of 26/4/2013.

The response, received on 22 May, acknowledged that the public had a legitimate interest in knowing this information which was in the BBC's possession, but declined to answer on grounds of commercial confidentiality. The BBC claimed that naming the companies which had expressed interest would prejudice their commercial interests by "causing damage to their business reputation or the confidence that customers, suppliers or investors may have in it; weaken[ing] their position in a competitive environment by revealing market-sensitive information or information of potential usefulness to competitors".

A request for an Internal Review, as permitted under BBC procedure, was lodged on 27 May and receipt was acknowledged on 6 June, with a response due within 30 working days of receipt (i.e. by 8 July).

As of 15 July, no response had been received. A complaint was lodged with the Information Commissioner's Office on 11 July.