What is Western Union?
Western Union is an American communications and financial services company. Founded in 1851, the company was a pioneer in the telegram industry, and is today a subsidiary of First Data Corporation- the industry leaders in credit cards and electronic payments. Western Union now focuses on its specialization in international money transfers between individuals through the Internet or through its 430,000 branches worldwide. It is considered to be the most important international money transfer company, reporting an annual income of 5.1 billion dollars in 2009, and operating in approximately 200 countries and territories.

How is Western Union implicated in Israel?
Although Western Union usually has its own independent branches, it is the Israel Postal Company Ltd. that is Western Union’s licensed operator in Israel. Western Union money transfers are therefore done from the 600 different Israel Post offices and agencies located across the country, many of which are situated in major Israeli colonies such as Ariel (in the mountains of the West Bank), Kiryat Arba (on the outskirts of Hebron) and Ma'ale Adumim. Under international law – particularly the UN Security Council Resolutions 446 and 465, and the Fourth Geneva Convention (Art.49) – the establishment of colonies and colonial infrastructures on occupied territory is not only illegal, but is also regarded as a war crime by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Why boycott Western Union?
By maintaining its agencies and commercial activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and illegal colonies, Western Union is accepting, legitimizing and profiting from the Israeli occupation. This is in direct violation of Article 3 (Section C) of the UN Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights, which clearly states that the implication of any business in war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of torture or any kind of violation of international and humanitarian law is illegal.

Following some major restructuring in 2006, the Israel Postal Company Ltd. became an exclusively state-owned corporation monopolizing Israeli postal services. Through its close partnership with Israel Post, Western Union is associating itself with an institution whose decisions and actions directly reflect the wishes of the Israeli government. In fact in July 2010, Israel Post decided to suspend mail delivery to Gaza for "security reasons outside its control". Such an embargo reinforced the siege and the isolation of the people of Gaza, and prevented any kind of humanitarian aid from entering the Strip by mail. Israel Post’s decision was strongly criticized by the Red Cross and Amnesty International. Furthermore, this initiative simultaneously contradicted Israel’s engagement to “loosen” the illegal blockade of Gaza; something that was strongly denounced by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). Israel Post’s interruption of communication services to Gaza is also a breach of international law, because it violates the Fourth Geneva Convention (Art 25) which specifically states that all occupying forces must allow the residents of the occupied territory to maintain contact with the outside world, and that “this correspondence shall be forwarded speedily and without undue delay” and that if it becomes difficult or impossible to do so, the occupier must fulfill their obligation under the best possible conditions.

Another crucial and revealing indication of Western Union’s direct involvement in the politics of the occupation is its ties with American and Israeli intelligence services. According to "The One Percent Doctrine" by renowned journalist Ron Suskind, First Data Corporation was one of many American companies to have been established as a valuable informants to the FBI, the CIA and the Shin Bet -Israel’s intelligence and internal security service- as part of the 2003-2004 "War on Terror". Western Union disclosed confidential client information and photographs, as well as the location of certain client transactions in the Middle East allowing the Shin Bet to monitor terrorist suspects in the occupied Palestinian territories and to eventually carry out extrajudicial killings. Having cooperated for military and
security purposes with Israel, Western Union consciously collaborated with a state whose army was accused of committing war crimes by the United Nations. Moreover, not only did Western Union breach its own Code of conduct, which specifically states that the company "collects, uses, stores and shares consumer information only for legitimate business purposes," Western Union also violated international law. According to Article 11 of the UN Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights, "[t]ransnational corporations and other business enterprises shall refrain from any activity which supports, solicits, or encourages States or any other entities to abuse human rights".  

Thereby, by profiting from its business in the colonies and openly collaborating with the Israeli government, Western Union is endorsing, taking part and even allowing Israel to maintain its illegal colonization and occupation of Palestinian territories. Thus, justice minded Canadians would want to boycott Western Union in an effort to see international law applied impartially in the region and to economically pressure Israel to cease its occupation. It is also important to note that in July 2005, more than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations issued a call asking the international community to boycott Israeli products in order to promote recognition of the Palestinians’ right to self-determination. Advocating for citizens in need regardless of their nationality, this call was made to boycott all businesses or institutions directly or indirectly supporting Israeli economy and especially Israel’s military occupation of Palestinian territories.

When should the boycott of Western Union end?
The boycott of Western Union will end when Israel ends its occupation of Palestinian territory, or when Western Union closes its agencies in the occupied territories and ends its partnership with the Israeli government.

In what other ways can I pressure Western Union to join the boycott?
CJPME’s boycott campaign is calling upon all individuals and members willing to put pressure on the Israeli government to withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories. All concerned citizens can visit the CJPME Website for additional tools to pressure Western Union to join the boycott.

- CJPME encourages individuals to visit its “Boycott Western Union: Action Alert” section at [www.cjpme.org/consumerboycott.htm](http://www.cjpme.org/consumerboycott.htm) to send their complaints and questions to the executive board of Western Union Inc.
- A mechanism to bring together shareholders of Western Union is set up at [http://www.cjpme.org/bds.htm](http://www.cjpme.org/bds.htm) to prepare for possible shareholders-based initiatives to pressure Western Union.

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1 For a complete list of Western Union branches in Israel, see http://www.israelpost.co.il/WL.nsf/6/City.pdf/$file/City.pdf
2 To know more about the Israeli occupation army’s violations of the International law, see CJPME factsheet, The Geneva Conventions and Israeli Activities in the Occupied Territories, March 2004.
5 Canada Post, “Communiqué à propos du courrier à destination de la bande de Gaza.” August 20, 2010
6 To know more about the illegality of the Gaza Blockade, see CJPME factsheet, The Illegality of the Gaza Blockade, June 2010
10 “UN Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with regard to Human Rights,” op cit