

Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories and the EU: A factsheet

The Company

The company, which was formed in 1988, produces a wide range of cosmetic products that incorporate Dead Sea minerals and mud. They are marketed in over 35 countries and exports account for 60% of its sales. They claim that “The Dead Sea Mineral Care products combine the Dead Sea’s finest minerals with scientific anti-aging formulas and natural ingredients to produce Dead Sea Cosmetics”.

The Location of Ahava

Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories (Ahava DSL) gives its official address as in Israel (Arava1, Airport City, Lod Airport), but its factory, visitors centre and laboratory are all situated in Mitzpe Shalem, a kibbutz which is about 1 km from the west shore of the Dead Sea. Mitzpe Shalem lies 10 km north of the Green Line and is therefore inside the West Bank. It was founded in 1970 and in 2007 was recorded as having a population of about 200. Mitzpe Shalem holds 37% of the Ahava company shares. The nearby settlement of Kalya holds another 7.5%.

The location of Mitzpe Shalem in the West Bank renders it illegal under international law, an unequivocal verdict returned on numerous occasions by bodies such as the United Nations [1] and the International Court of Justice in The Hague [2]. Moreover, the transfer of civilians from an occupying state into the occupied territory contravenes explicit provisions of the 4th Geneva Convention - a conclusion that concurs with that of the Israeli foreign ministry’s own legal counsel [3]

The assertions of certain Israeli groups and institutions (including Ahava), that Israel has a recognised right to settle its citizens in the West Bank and expropriate its land and resources, thus has no basis in international law. West Bank sovereignty without question rests with the Palestinian people, and not with Israel. It forms the basis for the internationally recognised ‘two state solution’ to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

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The present recognition of Ahava by EU as a potential partner in its FP7 projects appears to be based on the formality that its head office is located in Israel, with no account taken of the location of all its significant operations (including its laboratory) within the West Bank

At present the European Union formally recognises Ahava as a 'legal entity', entitling it to be considered for research funding under the Framework Programme, because it has registered its head office inside Israel. This current practice takes no account of the location of its main manufacturing and research activities within the West Bank. It also reveals an inconsistency in EU policy towards the settlements, which it regards as illegal [4]. The EU specifically excludes settlement goods from the tariff free trade that Israel enjoys under the EU- Israel Association Agreement, and yet turns a blind eye to Ahava's deceit in order to support its illegal activities through research funding.

The sources of Ahava's raw materials

The mud for the cosmetics is excavated from the shore of the Dead Sea inside West Bank, and not from the Israeli shore, as the company claims. In 2004, the Civil Administration of the Israeli Defence Force in the West Bank granted 'Dead Sea Laboratories' permission to extract mud from the area of the Megliot Dead Sea Regional Council, which includes both Mitzpe Shalem and Kalya, the nearby kibbutz where the extraction is believed to take place. A Freedom of Information request to the Israeli Defence Force Civil Administration produced evidence that Ahava was still extracting mud from the West Bank as recently as May 2011 [5].

The minerals used in Ahava cosmetics are supplied by Dead Sea Works, which is owned by Israel Chemicals Ltd. The operation of the Dead Sea Works in Israel at the southern edge of the Dead Sea is very controversial, with environmentalists claiming that its evaporation ponds are responsible for as much as 25%- 30% of the annual drop in the Dead Sea [6].

Activities of Dead Sea Laboratories

Research. DSL provides a list of 210 published reports describing the efficacy of the mineral products for the treatment of medical conditions affecting the skin, lungs, heart, joints, *etcetera*. Some papers are in peer reviewed journals. Current research includes studying the effects of Dead Sea minerals on skin cells in culture and on human subjects; assessing the effect of nano-particles on skin; developing a nano-particle system for the treatment and/or diagnosis of cancer; and the development of nano-particle systems that contain anti-psoriatic drugs [Note: Nanoparticles are defined as particles with at least one dimension between 1 and 100 nm. (1 nm =10⁻⁹ metres)]

DSL and the EU. DSL has received a total of €1,129M in EU funding from its Framework Programmes. It was the leader of an EU Framework 5 programme (CELLAGE), for which it received €49K in EU funding. It is currently participating in three FP7 projects. SKINTREAT (€521K over 4 years) and NANOTHER (€256K over 4 years) are mainly commercial. NANORETOX has 11 partners, of which just two appear to be commercial. This project, which includes Imperial College and Kings College London, concerns the reactivity and toxicity of engineered nanoparticles and the risks to the environment and human health. The project is coordinated by the Natural History Museum and the total budget is €302K over 4 years [7].

DSL and the NANORETOX project. It appears from the Nanorettox website [7] that DSL has two functions in the project: the first is to provide a supply of nanoparticles that have been prepared by milling; the second is to carry out toxicity tests on skin cells. Researchers at Imperial College will concentrate on the respiratory system. Whereas the emphasis of the other partners in NANORETOX is on toxicity, the DSL emphasis is on expanding the use of its basic material (Dead Sea mud) for a whole range of purposes extending from cosmetics to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

References

- [1] eg, United Nations Security Council Resolution no 465
- [2] <http://www.asil.org/insigh141.cfm>
- [3] In: Gershon Gorenburg, *The Accidental Empire*, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006, pp.99,101.
- [4] www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/125155.pdf
- [5] <http://www.stolenbeauty.org/article.php?id=5956>
- [6] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/18/AR2005051802400_pf.html
- [7] <http://www.nanorettox.eu/research-teams/>