

Furman's Apartheid Wall

In April 2016 VTJP wrote a letter to Ben and Jerry's Board of Directors Chair, Jeff Furman, a longtime civil rights activist and progressive voice in support of Palestinian rights. We asked him, and CEO Jostein Solheim as representatives of Ben and Jerry's, to publicly condemn the ominous targeting of Israeli Palestinian BDS co-founder Omar Bargouti by the Israeli Minister of Intelligence for "targeted civil thwarting" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukXAFxI8Ix4>). In this interview, the Minister makes accusations against Mr. Bargouti, insinuating that he and other BDS activists have ties to terrorist organisations, without giving any evidence. When we received no response from either, we called on our supporters to personally email Mr. Furman and Mr. Solheim and ask them to take appropriate action.

Mr. Furman did respond, but only as an individual, not as an official of Ben and Jerry's, the Chairman, in fact, of the Board of Directors. It is convenient to hide behind the powerlessness of one's individual's voice, to wring one's hands in anguish that Omar Bargouti's life has been threatened by Israeli officials, and to sign an online petition in his support as an example of the only thing that one can do. But this is the essence of PEP, Progressive Except for Palestine, and the stand that Ben and Jerry's, the Vermont-based company takes. They, and Mr. Furman have built their own convenient wall to stand behind, denying the fact that their existence in Israel and their ice cream sales within the illegal Jewish settlements, contributes to the normalisation of the egregious oppression of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Furman, who to his credit has himself has met with Mr. Bargouti, is in a position to do much more than sign an email petition on Mr. Bargouti's behalf – as Chairman of the BOD he could take the public, not private, behind the wall stand, that Israel's latest wrong against non-violent resistance must be sanctioned publicly, not by a commitment to justice whispered behind his own Apartheid Wall.