



Vermonters for Justice in Palestine

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Peace and Justice Center, 60 Lake Street, 1C, Burlington, VT 05401

May 18, 2018

Unilever

Corporate Office
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To the Kind Attention of:

Paul Polman, Chief Executive Officer
Strive Masiyiwa, Chair of Unilever's Corporate Responsibility Committee
Feike Sijbesma, Member of Unilever's Corporate Responsibility Committee
Amanda Sourry, President North America and Global Head of Customer Development
Keith Weed, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer

RE: Ben & Jerry's Complicity with Israel's Occupation and Illegal Settlements, Part II

Vermonters for Justice in Palestine (VTJP) is in receipt of a letter from Jostein Solheim, CEO of Ben & Jerry's in the United States. It is a response to our letter to you at Unilever dated April 24th, and Mr. Solheim was copied on it.

Mr. Solheim's position on Ben & Jerry's complicity with Israel's military occupation and illegal settlement regime is well known to us, which is why we did not write to him in this round of correspondence. Moreover, once again, he did not acknowledge or respond directly to our argument on why it is necessary for Ben & Jerry's to end its franchise's business in Israel's unlawful settlements.

To be clear, VTJP is receptive to further conversations with Mr. Solheim and the company's Board of Directors, provided they are grounded to the understanding that Israel's occupation, now in its 51st year, is a violation of international law, and that our dialogue is committed to investigating how Ben & Jerry's can terminate the sale of its "peace & love" ice cream in fortified, Jewish-only settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

But it is also imperative that Unilever engage directly and fully with VTJP on the question of Ben & Jerry's commercial complicity with Israel's occupation, especially now when the situation in occupied Palestine is so desperate and deadly.

Gaza

We received Mr. Solheim's letter while another savage bloodbath was occurring in the besieged and occupied territory of Gaza, with Israeli snipers, well removed from harm's way, wantonly killing and maiming unarmed protesters.

According to the **United Nations**, between March 30 and May 15, Israeli occupation forces killed at least 110 Palestinians on Gaza's side of the fenced-off demarcation zone with Israel). 12,000 were injured, many critically, nearly 3,400 from live ammunition.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians had assembled and protested peacefully over these seven weeks for their freedom and the right to return to their ancestral lands and homes in Israel-Palestine. This campaign of non-violent actions was called "The Great March of Return."

Here is the carnage report for one day, Monday, May 14, according to the **Gaza Ministry of Health**:

- 61 Palestinians killed, including 8 minors and 1 paramedic
- 2,771 injured – including 225 minors, 11 journalists, 17 paramedics
- 130 in serious and critical condition
- 1,360 shot by Israeli soldiers using live Israeli ammunition.

As reported by the Israeli news blog 972+, the Israeli Democracy Institute's Peace Index poll for April found that "83 percent of Jewish Israelis find the IDF's open fire policy in Gaza 'appropriate.'"¹

The **Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) in Gaza** published this summary of the events for May 14:

- *The demonstrations have been entirely peaceful, and the fieldworkers have not witnessed any armed manifestations despite the state of outrage and fervor prevailing among the demonstrators who were hundreds of thousands. An outstanding participation of women and children in the demonstrations.*
- *The Israeli Forces unprecedentedly and heavily stationed along the border fence and inside the military sites surrounding the area along with intensive flight of the Israeli warplanes.*
- *Tear gas canisters were intensively and unprecedentedly fired from the drones and by the Israeli soldiers stationed along the border fence or in the military sites. The tear gas has spared none, including PCHR's staff that was in the field.*
- *Ambulances, medical staff, and field clinics were deliberately and directly targeted and prevented from approaching those wounded in addition to causing injuries among them.*
- *Journalists are directly targeted, causing injuries among them.*
- *The Israeli fire targeted the upper part of the body as dozens sustained wounds to the head and chest and many are in critical condition; thus, the number of deaths is likely to increase.*²

B'Tselem, Israel's leading human rights organization, unequivocally denounced Israel's attacks on the people of Gaza, calling on Jewish soldiers to "hold your fire." In echoes of Nuremberg, it warned:

"The responsibility for issuing these unlawful orders and for their lethal consequences [in Gaza] rests with the policy makers and – above all – with Israel's prime minister, defense minister, and

¹ <https://972mag.com/we-are-all-accomplices-to-israels-massacre-in-gaza/135348/>

² <http://pchrgaza.org/en/?p=10838>

the chief of staff. They are also the ones who bear the obligation to change these regulations immediately,....

“That said, it is also a criminal offense to obey manifestly illegal orders. Therefore, as long as soldiers in the field continue to receive orders to use live fire against unarmed civilians, they are duty-bound to refuse to comply.”³

Ten days earlier...

Mr. Solheim’s letter is dated May 4, a Friday. Here is what took place that day in Gaza according to PCHR field staff:

- *The Israeli snipers deliberately and selectively opened fire at the participants in the peaceful demonstrations which included thousands of civilians in 5 areas in the eastern Gaza Strip. ...[M]ost injuries occur in the demonstrating area that is around 30-300 meters away from the border fence.*
- *The Israeli forces widely used bursts of tear gas canisters targeting the center of the demonstrations and beyond away from the demonstrators near the border fence. As a result, hundreds, including PCHR’s fieldworkers who were documenting the incidents, suffered tear gas inhalation and seizures; some of them were transferred to hospitals.... Teargassing hysterically intensified after the demonstrators dropped 2 small drones flown by the Israeli forces in the sky of the demonstration area, east of Khan Yunis, as the 2 drones were flying very low.*
- *The demonstrations were as always fully peaceful, and PCHR’s fieldworkers did not witness weapons or armed persons even dressed in civilian clothes among the demonstrators, who were thousands of elderly, women, children and entire families.*
- *Journalists were again directly targeted resulting in the injury of 5 of them (2 in Khan Yunis, 2 in al-Burajj and one in east of Gaza City) as many tear gas canisters fell in the vicinity of the journalists’ encampment in Khuza’ah. As a result, many journalists suffered tear gas inhalation.*
- *The Israeli incitement against the peaceful demonstrations and encampments continues as extension of previous statements by Israeli political and military officials threatening to inflict deaths and injuries among the demonstrators in addition to perceiving the demonstration itself as danger. This hereby violates the right to peaceful assembly codified in all International instruments.⁴*

While Gaza Was Burning: B&J’s “Peace & Love” Ice Cream Was Being Sold In Illegal Settlements

Lest you think that while Gazans were being slaughtered Israeli business owners, like Ben & Jerry’s Avi Zinger, and Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were widely and fruitfully engaged in cooperative economic ventures and multi-cultural exchanges of the kind Mr. Solheim promotes in his letter, consider these facts for the seven days that began May 3 and ended May 9:

³ https://www.btselem.org/firearms/20180404_why_soldiers_must_refuse_to_fire_at_unarmed_protesters

⁴ <http://pchrgaza.org/en/?p=10773>

Israeli forces conducted at least 70 incursions into Palestinian communities in the West Bank and 12 similar ones in Jerusalem and its suburbs.

- 100 civilians, including 22 children and a woman, were arrested.
- 34 of them, including 10 children and a woman, were arrested in Jerusalem.

The Israeli authorities continued to create a Jewish majority in occupied East Jerusalem.

- Two commercial facilities were demolished in Beit Safafa and al-Issawiyah, and 2 civilians were forced to self-demolish a house and commercial warehouses.
- “Ateret Cohanim” [Jewish-only] settlement association handed [the] Abu Sneinah Family a house eviction order in Silwan village, claiming ownership of the building.

Israeli forces continued their settlement activities in the West Bank.

- 42 dunums were confiscated in al-Khader village, south of Bethlehem, for security reasons.
- 5 residential rooms and 5 sheep barns were demolished while 4 solar cells were confiscated in Masafer Yatta.
- Israeli settlers cut 14 olive trees, south of Nablus, and levelled lands, west of Salfit.

Israeli forces turned the West Bank into cantons.

- Dozens of temporary checkpoints were established in the West Bank and others were re-established to obstruct the movement of Palestinian civilians.
- 6 Palestinian civilians were arrested at the military checkpoints in the West Bank.⁵

Also in early May, B'Tselem published a report on the pervasive and devastating impact of Jewish settler violence on Palestinian farmers during plowing season (“*Plowing season 2018, Ramallah District: Settler violence serves Israel*”). We recommend the report in its entirety, but the first paragraph alone makes clear what is stake for Palestinian farmers – and for occupied Palestine as a whole – if Israel’s settler regime and occupation do not end as soon as possible: **Settler violence against Palestinians – resulting in death, injury and property damage – has long since become part of daily life under occupation in the West Bank.** In some cases, soldiers are present as the incidents unfold and do nothing to prevent the violence. In others, they protect the violent settlers, or join in. Whatever the level of involvement, in the vast majority of cases, the settlers and soldiers who take part in such incidents do not pay any sort of price for their conduct, and ineffective investigations (on the rare occasion that they are opened) are closed with no action taken [emphasis added].⁶

⁵ <http://pchrgaza.org/en/?p=10773>

⁶ https://www.btselem.org/video/20180509_settler_violence_during_plowing_season_serves_israel#full

Now imagine Israeli settlers strolling through the freezer aisles of Shufersal to purchase Ben & Jerry's ice cream, oblivious to or uncaring about the suffering and deprivation in Palestinian villages close by; or party carts painted with iconic images of dairy cows and bucolic landscapes, departing from Ben & Jerry's factory in Israel for settlements in the oPt, to scoop ice cream and to feed the illusion that life in those colonies, which are built on stolen land and where non-Jews are not permitted to live, is no different than life anywhere else.

Please. We must be serious with and respectful of each other. Let's not waste time debating the discredited Oslo Accords, or pretending that doing business in Jewish colonies as defenseless Palestinians are being massacred in Gaza and Palestinian homes are being demolished in East Jerusalem does not make a mockery of human rights' law and Ben & Jerry's Social Mission.

VTJP again requests a direct response **from Unilever** to its April letter. Your company is ultimately responsible for the ice cream sold and catered in Israeli settlements by Ben & Jerry's franchise.

If it would be useful, I and my compatriots are willing to speak with you in person, in either Europe or the United States. Mr. Solheim, his Board Directors, and his management team are welcome to join such a meeting.

Thank you. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mark Hage, on behalf of Vermonters for Justice in Palestine (www.vtjp.org)

cc: Jostein Solheim
Jeff Furman
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