

Ben & Jerry's Takes the Path of Least Resistance

Refuses to Stop the Sale of its Ice Cream in Israeli Settlements

May, 2014

In March, 2013, Vermonters for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel (www.vtjp.org/icecream) called on Ben & Jerry's to end its Israeli franchise's business with Jewish-only settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. After hearing from people and organizations in the United States and across the world in support of this demand, the company responded formally in [a letter](#) dated April 16^t 2014.

Its answer, in a nutshell: **No.**

There is not a single reference in the letter to Israel's military occupation or settlements, nor does the letter attempt to reconcile the company's Social Mission with its franchise business in settlement venues.

It responds to VTJP's call and campaign, essentially, by ignoring particulars and focusing instead on what it calls "constructive steps" to improve life in Occupied Palestine. But there's no misreading what is tucked between the lines: *Its franchise's commerce in Israeli settlements will not be terminated or curtailed.*

Constructive Engagement with the Victims of Israel's Occupation

The April 16th letter was signed by Rob Michalak, Director of Global Mission. It commits Ben & Jerry's to deepening its business relationship with **Canaan Fair Trade (CFT)**, a Palestinian enterprise that markets agricultural goods produced by farmers and cooperatives under occupation.

Specifically, this will entail "supporting Canaan Fair Trade farmers and expanding their opportunities in the global marketplace," and "sourcing Fairtrade-certified ingredients from local [Palestinian] farmers."

Michalak also asserts that royalties from its franchise in Israel will be invested in "programs that promote peace through constructive business activities in the region."

Finding the Company's "Role" ...and Coming Up Short

Michalak says Ben & Jerry's took "unprecedented steps to understand what our role is in this instance." The company, in fact, did engage in a long process of research and introspection that involved traveling to Occupied Palestine and dialogue with Palestinian and Israeli Jewish activists. Here are the highlights:

Board president Jeff Furman traveled to Palestine in 2012 with a delegation of African-American civil rights leaders, and described to VTJP what he witnessed there as a form of "apartheid."

Chief Financial Officer Mike Graning visited Palestine, briefly, in 2013.

CEO Jostein Solheim, Rob Michalak, and Board Directors traveled to Palestine and Israel in March this year for several days.

Rob Michalak informed us that representatives (unnamed) from “both sides of the conflict” had addressed them in Vermont in 2013.

The good news: Company officials and directors have seen up close (and heard from trusted sources) what it means for Palestinians to live under the boot of an occupation army, to be denied their civil rights and the protections of international law, and to be dispossessed and terrorized by Jewish settlers.

The bad news: The company will not pull the plug on their franchise’s business in Israeli settlements, though these fortified, segregated colonies pose a well-documented, existential threat to the livelihood, land and water of the Palestinian farmers the company is trying to assist through Canaan Fair Trade.

Survival & Liberation

Canaan Fair Trade is an important and effective organization. In an April 22nd posting on its [Facebook Page](#) we find these words from Jeff Furman:

I was deeply moved by my recent visit to Canaan Fair trade in the West Bank. Their work is incredibly important as it gives the small holder farmers a hope of surviving the occupation.

The expanded support Ben & Jerry’s has promised CFT, however admirable and necessary, is not mutually exclusive of bolder measures VTJP has urged the company to take: **end the Israeli franchise’s business in illegal settlements and issue a statement in opposition to Israeli’s occupation and colonial policies.**

It is not enough for Ben & Jerry’s only to help an oppressed people survive when it has the means and the ethical compass of its Social Mission to aid in their liberation.

In light of the April 16th letter, VTJP will now advance its campaign to the next stage.