

Press Release: Ben & Jerry's forced by Unilever to back out of commitments to withdraw from business in Israel and Palestine.

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Date June 30th 2022. For immediate release.

Ben & Jerry's has been forced by its parent company Unilever to back out of its July 19th 2021 announcement that they will end sales of their ice cream in illegal settlements, and terminate the contract with their license holder when it expires at the end of 2022. Then, Ben & Jerry's declared that they 'will end sales of our ice cream in the Occupied Palestinian Territory [which] we believe it is inconsistent with our values'. The decision effectively reversing this was [announced by Unilever](#) (the parent company that acquired Ben & Jerry's in 2011), apparently 'pulling rank' over Ben & Jerry's and its Board of Directors. This disarray reflected in [statements](#) from @benandjerrys on the evening of Unilever's announcement.

It is unclear at this stage exactly what the Israeli company will have access to in terms of branding, recipes, etc. and whether Ben and Jerry's and/or Unilever will derive any share of the profits. It is reported that the Israeli company will identify itself with Hebrew and Arabic names, perhaps in an effort by Ben & Jerry's to be distanced from the Israeli company.

The July 2021 announcement was confusing, since we knew that any company operating in Israel is not allowed to exclude sales in the illegal settlements. Therefore, the intent to remain in Israel 'in some form' appeared to be based on astonishing ignorance of the realities there.

It is possible that several factors led to this reversal by Unilever, likely scared by the precedent of one of many Unilever products being discontinued in Israel. Apart from the social pressure both supportive and not by B&J customers and others, the lawsuit filed in late February 2022 by the owner of the franchise in Israel, Avi Zinger, alleging breach of contract as well as harm to his business and employees may have been another factor that scared the Vermont company and Unilever. When Unilever acquired Ben & Jerry's in 2000, they agreed "Licensor [Ben & Jerry's] shall use commercially reasonable efforts to obtain (at Licensor's expense) for Licensee [Unilever] the right to conduct all facets of the Business in Israel"

(<https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/0000768384/000091205700030913/defm14a.txt>)

In Unilever's Press Release

<https://www.unilever.com/news/press-and-media/press-releases/2022/unilever-reaches-new-business-arrangement-for-ben-jerrys-in-israel/>

they state that:

"Unilever is very proud of our business in Israel which supplies everyday household products to people across the country."

and

"Unilever rejects completely and repudiates unequivocally any form of discrimination or intolerance. Antisemitism has no place in any society. We have never expressed any support for

the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement and have no intention of changing that position."

So Unilever is apparently proud to be operating in Israel – a country that has repeatedly been found to practice crimes of Apartheid, most recently by Amnesty International and B'tselem.

VTJP is disgusted that the antisemitism trope has been raised by Unilever, implying that criticizing Israel and holding that country to account implies that Israel represents all Jewish people. This is an insult to many people who are Jewish.

VTJP urges people worldwide to express their disgust at this reversal of an ethical decision by Unilever.