



RURAL VT STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE & SUPPORT FOR ACTIONS BY BEN & JERRY'S INC.

OCTOBER 2021

Rural Vermont stands in solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemns the Israeli State's systemic human rights violations, discrimination, and the illegal occupation and blockade of Palestine which has now affected generations of Palestinians and the lands of Palestine.

On April 27 2021, [Human Rights Watch](#) released a 213-page [report](#) entitled "**A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution.**" This is not the first organization or report to describe Israel's actions in Palestine as "apartheid" ([UN ESCWA Report On Israeli Apartheid](#)). Michael Lynk, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, has described illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem as a "[war crime](#)". The Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, has confiscated land and property from thousands of Palestinians who have been there for generations. Military blockades continue to limit the distribution of supplies, including food and water, and there is widespread and life threatening lack of access to medical care and a restriction of movement for Palestinian peoples, affecting how and if they can go to work, school, visit family members, or even access their farmland. The bombing of crops, chemical destruction of beehives, burning of olive trees, and destruction of agricultural roads are just a few of the injustices Palestinian farmers face. The results are felt by all Palestinians, over one million of whom are refugees and currently reside in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and nearby occupied territories.

There are many significant and devastating regimes of discrimination around the world. We feel it is critical for Rural VT and others to speak in solidarity with Palestinians for a number of reasons, in particular the historical and ongoing role of the United States, and US based companies, in condoning and perpetuating the systemic inequities, disproportionate violence, and apartheid inflicted by the State of Israel on the Palestinian peoples. The United States has used its privilege in the UN Security Council [to veto dozens of United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\) resolutions critical of Israel](#), including at least 53 since 1972, according to [UN data](#). In 2020 alone, the US gave 3.8 billion dollars in aid to the State of Israel, almost all of it for military assistance (BBC June 2021)[1]. US support has allowed Israel to have nuclear capabilities and one of the most advanced militaries in the world, and this support directly supports the ongoing and illegal occupation and blockade of Palestine and the continued displacement, killing, incarceration, and maiming of Palestinian men, women, and children.

In the early Summer of 2021, as violence once again escalated in East Jerusalem and Gaza (resulting in the killing of at least [256 Palestinians including 66 children](#), as well as an estimated 13 Israelis including 2 children), Rural VT joined many other 2020 Ben & Jerry's Foundation grant recipients in signing onto a [letter to Ben and Jerry's Inc.](#)'s leadership drafted and initiated by the Pilsen Alliance, and assisted by members of Vermonters for Justice in Palestine, the BDS Movement, Jewish Voice for Peace, and If Not Now. [Vermonters for Justice in Palestine](#), among other organizations, has been urging Ben & Jerry's Inc. to discontinue its sales and operations in occupied Palestine, and meet other demands, for over a decade. The letter was to be delivered on July 20th, however on July 19th Ben & Jerry's Inc. released a [statement](#) saying they would cease sales in the occupied Palestinian territories. We applaud Ben & Jerry's Inc., while recognizing this as a small but important step for this and other companies to take. Please see a full statement of response to Ben & Jerry's Inc. and Unilever (which has not taken a similar action as Ben & Jerry's Inc.) drafted by the Pilsen Alliance which Rural VT stands in solidarity with [here](#). This statement importantly calls attention to the political backlash Ben & Jerry's is now facing: *"In the wake of these efforts for justice, Democrat and Republican legislators have launched a wave of anti-BDS laws in state legislatures across the U.S. in an attempt to oppress and silence Palestinian activists and anyone advocating for Palestinian freedom. We encourage everyone to follow and join efforts to prevent and dismantle these laws in your state: BDS movement (@BDSmovement), US Palestinian Community Network (@uspcn), Palestine Legal (@pal_legal), Jewish Voice for Peace Action #SaveSheikhJarrah (@JvpAction).* Please let Ben & Jerry's Inc. know that you support and commend its decision to pursue a just course of action in Palestine.

Rural Vermont affirms the equal rights of all Palestinian people and Israeli Jews to self-determination, and to freedom from discrimination and human rights abuses. We reject the narrative that criticism of the Israeli government is anti-Semitic. This narrative seeks to conflate criticism of a Nation State based on its actions with discrimination against a people based on their religion and / or ethnicity. The existence and actions of Jewish organizations that advocate in opposition to Zionism and in support of Palestinian liberation and justice, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, directly contradicts this narrative. Palestinian and Jewish peoples have both faced extreme historical traumas, discrimination, and dispossession. We explicitly stand with our Jewish, Palestinian, and Muslim brothers and sisters against antisemitism, against islamophobia, and against discrimination towards Palestinians in the pursuit for equality, safety, and dignity for all peoples. National self-determination cannot be a

fundamental right awarded to some yet denied to others. It is wrong to dehumanize any peoples, and efforts involving the dehumanization and oppression of one peoples in pursuit of liberation for another bring us ever further from our collective liberation.

The situation in Gaza is especially dire. People in Gaza live under a state of siege and frequent military attacks. In the agricultural sector alone, Gaza's Ministry of Agriculture estimates around \$27 million in damages from the recent outbreak of violence, including greenhouses, wells & irrigation systems, and agricultural lands. Many thousands of peasant farmers and fisherfolk in Gaza have experienced crop losses (estimated over 50 hectares) and damages to infrastructure. Water supplies and farmland have been polluted by missile attacks and many are covered in rubble. The recent closure of the seas and destruction of fishing boats currently threatens the food security of about 3600 families (Via Campesina 2021). The United Nations estimates that approximately 800,000 people in Gaza do not have regular access to clean piped water, as nearly 50 percent of the water network was damaged in the spring 2021 bombing.

Even as access to water, food, healthcare, and education are limited, there is resistance and there is hope. Palestinian agriculturists in occupied lands are protecting and preserving their indigenous practices. Through La Via Campesina, an international network of peasant and landless farmers, Rural Vermont is connected to organizations like the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, who are working to preserve cultural heritage in Palestine while protecting biodiversity and maintaining soil health, and also through the creation of a seed bank. Women and youth agriculturists and the knowledge of community elders are held in high regard. We stand in struggle and solidarity to exert peasant rights and the rights of landless peoples to pursue food sovereignty as part of our liberation. Food sovereignty is nonviolent resistance and a form of self-determination.

Let us stand with the people of Palestine in their struggle, as a critical part of our collective struggle for justice, and a future in which all peoples can live safe and dignified lives.

[1] <https://www.bbc.com/news/57170576>

[2] <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1078532>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/07/debunking-myth-that-anti-zionism-is-antisemitic>

Other Sources

<https://viacampesina.org/en/act-now-to-support-gazas-farmers-farmworkers-and-fisherfolk-help-gaza-feed-itself/>

<https://viacampesina.org/en/la-via-campesina-denounces-israeli-military-raid-on-uawc-headquarters/>

We invite you to learn about and support the following groups and organizations. This list is not comprehensive. Let us know if there are groups you feel should be included on this list.

[Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability](#)

[Palestine Museum of Natural History](#)

[The Union of Agricultural Work Committees](#)

[1for3](#)

[Via Campesina](#)

Solidarity Groups in Vermont and the Northeast

[New England Network for Justice for Palestine](#)

[Vermonters for Justice in Palestine](#)

[Jewish Voice for Peace](#)