

Israel: profiting from both the destruction and aid of Gaza

In the past month, a plethora of emergency aid responses, organisational position statements and NGO campaigns have been launched in response to the catastrophic Israeli assault on Gaza. Unfortunately, these have been of mixed quality, with most of them making strong comments on the level of destruction in Gaza yet, meanwhile, refusing to publicly condemn the architect of this destruction – the Israeli state and its allies who provide resources regardless of their known complicity in war crimes.

Beyond this complicity in Israel's destruction of Gaza, many parties are also maintaining complicity in Israel's profiteering in Gaza's reconstruction. Due to the nature of the land, air and sea blockade that has been imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2007 (further compounded by the recent destruction of the majority of smuggling tunnels that were Gaza's most important resource lifeline), the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid, including medical supplies, food, potable water and other necessities, is immensely challenging. Unfortunately, however, some organisations and private appeals have rushed to deliver these goods, without considering the manner in which they fundamentally strengthen the Israeli economy that resources the unrelenting attacks inflicted upon Gaza.

One such example of this is a recent campaign launched on the online crowd-funding platform 'Indiegogo'. Initiated by Dr. Gershon Baskin, founder and director of the Israel/Palestinian Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), the campaign – entitled "5000 tons surplus potatoes that will be destroyed Sunday. Let's send them to Gaza" – seeks to buy surplus potatoes from Israeli sellers and send them as food aid to Gaza. The campaign has generated more than US\$60,000 in a matter of days. Whilst intentions may seem positive, the implications of such entirely careless appeals do far more harm than good. In purchasing potatoes from Israeli producers, this appeal directly contributes to the very state entity that is responsible for the mass denials of basic rights and resources to the Palestinian population; a reality that the UN has unreservedly labelled "collective punishment". As such, the emergency response being undertaken only serves to support and normalize the system that will be responsible for the next assault on Gaza.

Furthermore, whilst the language and marketing style used throughout this campaign seek to suggest that that primary motivation of the campaign is one of dire humanitarian concern, donors should take caution. In an email circulated by the IPCRI on August 14, 2014, it is revealed that the original idea came not from IPCRI itself as a "peace" organisation, but from Israeli agricultural expert, Hillel Adiri. Adiri is currently a senior technical *marketing* adviser for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Beyond this, the economic rather than humanitarian motivations of this campaign are made exceedingly clear by Baskin himself. "They can't market these potatoes [in Israel] because then the market would be flooded and the prices would go down...We don't want our farmers to go bankrupt", he said. In response to security and accountability questions, Baskin simply declared, "You're not going to use potatoes to make rockets".

PNGO subsequently calls on the international community to eschew recklessness in their distribution of aid funds to critically flawed campaigns that do nothing to sustainably assist the Palestinian people, yet do everything to support to Israel. Further we demand that FAO (and other humanitarian organisations) remain committed to its stated mission to "mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action", and to "alleviate human suffering in disasters and emergencies" through rights advocacy, prevention mechanisms, and by "facilitating *sustainable* solutions", instead of

using their influence to secure prices for the Israeli agricultural economy.

Rather, PNGO views the current crisis as an important opportunity for international and national organisations to bolster the Palestinian economy and its society, rather than to 'prop-up' the Israeli state so that the same atrocities can be committed once again. PNGO urges organisations to be meticulous in sourcing aid supplies of every kind from within Palestine itself. If this is not possible due to Israel's ongoing suffocation of economic development in the occupied territories, then the supplies should be sourced regionally from countries such as Jordan and Egypt, among others, so as not to further intensify the grave situation both now and in the future. In this way, national and international humanitarian organisations can avoid rewarding Israel twice for its horrific onslaught against Gaza and, importantly, against Palestinian freedom and human rights all together.

PNGO Network
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