MEMBER SUBMISSION: FAMINE IN GAZA IS A COOP ISSUE

March 19, 2024



By Jan Clausen

People in Gaza are starving. On January 29, the *New York Times* reported that "people are eating animal feed to survive" and quoted Bob Kitchen of the International Rescue Committee: "It is the most intense hunger crisis I have ever seen. Almost everyone is now hungry." The crisis stems from Israel's near-total blockade in tandem with a merciless military assault. Foodstuffs that do filter in can't be properly distributed. Desperate people in search of supplies have been slaughtered by Israeli forces.

On January 15, Dr. King's birthday holiday, I attended a vigil to mourn this manufactured crisis. Sponsored by organizations including Jews for Racial and Economic Jus-

tice and NY-10 Neighbors, the event was held at the Irish Hunger Memorial. Speakers of Irish and South Asian descent pointed to famine as a universal weapon of colonial regimes. For example, in 1943 the British colonial government in Bengal refused famine relief and millions died. In Palestine, hunger serves a genocidal project openly celebrated by Israeli officials like reservist Major General Giora Eiland, who wrote that "Creating a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza is a necessary means to achieve [Israel's] goal." (Following the Hunger Vigil, the International Court of Justice found a credible case that Israel is committing genocide, based partly on such statements.)

FOOD IS AN ELEMENTAL NEED SHARED BY ALL HUMANS. IT BINDS US TOGETHER AS COOP MEMBERS AND LINKS US TO PALESTINIANS WHO ARE NEEDLESSLY STARVING THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY.

For years I've advocated for a PSFC boycott of Israeli products in solidarity with Palestine. I knew that Israel long ago "put Gaza on a diet," allowing in just enough foodstuffs to meet minimum per capita caloric requirements. In recent weeks, I'd read a U.N. official's warning that Gazans "live through the unlivable, with the clock ticking fast towards famine." I'd felt guilty about enjoying my good Coop food as I thought of children going days without a meal. Yet what I heard at the Hunger Memorial brought home the connection between food and human freedom in a new way. I remembered that the vicious weapon of hunger was used by some of my own ancestors against Dakota people whose lands they stole in a place now called Minnesota.

Food is an elemental need shared by all humans. It binds us together as Coop members and links us to Palestinians who are needlessly starving thousands of miles away. I believe in our moral obligation to use our Coop's purchasing power to combat oppression, as we've done with many past boycotts including our boycott of apartheid South Africa. Following the Hunger Vigil, my sense that food justice is the pivot of the Palestinian struggle makes even more meaningful the chance to leverage our purpose as a Coop to enact solidarity.

I hope that by the time this article appears, a Gaza ceasefire will be achieved. Yet that won't be enough to end the acute hunger crisis, especially now that the U.S. and allies have cruelly halted support for UNRWA, the U.N. agency largely responsible for meeting Gaza's nutritional needs. I will redouble my work on behalf of a PSFC boycott of all Israeli products.

Author's Note: This article was submitted at the end of January. Since that time, the manufactured famine in Gaza has massively accelerated, with starvation deaths on the rise and atrocities such as Israel's "Flour Massacre" further underscoring the need for concerted Coop action in support of Palestine.

Jan Clausen is a writer, teacher, and activist with Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine.