

McDonald's and Starbucks sink as anti-Israel boycott campaign makes headway



By Maryam Qarehgozlou / Press TV

Devoid of its trademark hustle and bustle, a solitary worker is seen cleaning the tables at the once vibrant McDonald's franchise in Egypt amid the successful boycott campaign against popular food chains with

links to the Israeli regime and its Western backers.

The hum of conversation, laughter, and the sizzling sound of burgers being grilled his missing, replaced by an eerie silence after McDonald's franchise in the occupied Palestinian territories announced in October it provided thousands of free meals and discounts to the Israeli military.

The announcement sparked immediate backlash, particularly in Muslim countries sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and also prompted calls for a consumer boycott against the apartheid entity.

Pertinently, about 4 percent of the 2.3 million population of the Gaza Strip—more than 90,000 people—have been declared dead, wounded, or missing after almost 100 days of unchecked Israeli aggression.

The act of the McDonald's branch also led to its franchises in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Turkey issuing statements and distancing themselves from the move. They collectively pledged more than \$3m to support Palestinians under bombardment in Gaza.

"Let us all combine our efforts and support the community in Gaza with everything we can," McDonald's Oman franchise posted on X after it pledged \$100,000 in humanitarian aid to Gaza.

McDonald's Tel Aviv branch had to immediately change its Instagram account to "private" following a stunning backlash from consumers in Arab and Muslim countries. To recoup the losses, McDonald's Pakistan franchise has reportedly been offering discounted prices for some food items amid calls to boycott the American multinational fast food chain which was founded in 1940 by Richard and Maurice McDonald.

An employee at McDonald's corporate offices in Egypt was quoted as saying by Reuters that the Egyptian franchise's October and November sales fell by at least 70 percent compared to the same months last year. "We are struggling to cover our own expenses during this time," the employee said.

Egyptians, who can barely organize public demonstrations on the ground to express their solidarity with Palestinians due to security restrictions and Cairo's anti-protests laws, see the boycott of U.S. and Israel-linked food chains as an ideal and safe way to have their voices heard.

"I feel that even if I know this will not have a massive impact on the war, then this is the least we can do as citizens of different nations so we don't feel like our hands are covered in blood," said 31-year-old Cairo resident Reham Hamed, who is boycotting U.S. fast food chains.

The campaigns against McDonald's and other multinational fast-food chains have significantly expanded in recent months across the world, including regional countries such as Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, also responded to calls to boycott the Chicago-headquartered fast food chain along with other chains linked with Israel or the United States. "I have not been to McDonald's since we found out that McDonald's Israel had been providing assistance and discounts to the Israeli military," Ade Andrian, operational manager of the Medan branch of the humanitarian organization Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C), was quoted as saying.

While McDonald's is an American brand, according to the company's data most of its restaurants worldwide are locally owned and operated.

On Thursday, the chief executive of McDonald's, Chris Kempczinski revealed in a letter that the company has suffered a "meaningful business impact" due to the controversy surrounding Israel's war on Gaza.

Kempczinski said calls for a boycott of the chain fast-food giant had hurt the sales in several markets both in West Asia and "some outside the region."

Kempczinski didn't disclose the figures. The fast food chain is expected to report its earnings later this month, which could reveal more about the effect of the boycott campaign on its operations.

Other major Western outlets known for their food or beverages also find themselves in troubled waters for their links with the Israeli regime and the ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Starbucks, an American multinational chain of coffeehouses and roasteries headquartered in Seattle, has also seen billions of dollars worth of losses due to global Palestine solidarity boycotts.

Videos posted on X show empty Starbucks stores in London, Australia, Dubai and elsewhere.

This came after the company in October sued the Workers United union, which represents thousands of baristas at about 360 US stores after the union posted a pro-Palestinian message on social media.

The company claimed the post "reflected" the union's "support for violence perpetrated by Hamas."

Nonetheless, protesters saw the company's move as pro-Israel.

In December 2023, the losses of Starbucks stood at \$12 billion in value during the last quarter, due to Palestinian solidarity boycotts and employee strikes.

To recover losses, Starbucks has been offering attractive deals to draw customers, including half-price drinks on Thursdays, or allowing consumers to receive a free holiday cup with every purchase during the holiday season.

Despite the marketing gimmick, the company's market share crashed by 8.96 percent in mid-November, accounting for billions in losses, the lowest the company has experienced since 1992.

While McDonald's and Starbucks seem to be at the heart of the anti-Israel boycott campaign, other brands are also feeling the heat for their perceived bias towards Israel.

Other American companies including Burger King, KFC, Pizza Hut, and Papa John's as well as brands such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Wix, Puma, and Zara that have pro-Israeli stances or have financial ties with Israel and investments there also came under fire and faced boycott calls.



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BDS leaps back into the spotlight

The grassroots boycott of products and services that support Israeli violence against Palestinians has again brought the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement into the spotlight.

The BDS was set up in 2005 by a coalition of about 170 Palestinian civil society groups. It is a non-violent movement that advocates for economic and cultural boycotts, financial divestment, and government sanctions to pressure Israel to abide by international law and end its apartheid policies toward Palestinians, who are “entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity.”

It aims to shake up Western support of Israel by effectively focusing on selected companies and products that are directly complicit in Israel’s policies against Palestinians.

According to Omar Bargouhti, one of the BDS co-founders, the recent boycott spree against McDonald’s and other Western brands was not initiated by the BDS but has increased interest in the movement. “The fact that many spontaneous boycott activists are now reaching out to the BDS movement for guidance on building strategic and sustainable campaigns gives us hope that indeed beyond stopping Israel’s current genocidal war in Gaza – supported by the U.S., EU, UK, Canada, Australia and others – we can channel all this unprecedented outrage into strategic campaigns that can truly cut a lot of the ongoing complicity in Israeli crimes,” Bargouhti was quoted as saying in media. He said Israel has for many years dedicated a full ministry to fighting the BDS movement.

According to a partially redacted Israeli report from 2013, BDS can potentially cost the regime in Tel Aviv up to \$11.5 billion a year.

A 2015 report from the global policy think tank Rand Corporation estimated that nonviolent Palestinian resistance, including BDS, could incur a loss of \$15 billion to Israel’s gross domestic product.

In recent years, Israel’s diplomatic missions have made countering BDS a priority and its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has moved to ban groups that support the movement.

“While we may not always have a substantial economic impact on the franchises, we use our purchasing power to condemn Israel’s horrendous actions in Gaza and as a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian cause,” boycotter Fatimah told the Press TV Website.

However, the postgraduate in economics at the University of Tehran said boycotting in unison and with consistency helps to restrict money and make a greater impact.

“We have a say in how these companies spend the money we pay them, therefore I believe taking such collective actions against Israel and its supporters builds awareness among communities, empowers people and challenges the status quo,” she noted.

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