



PayPal

for Palestinians

in Palestine



By Abed Almonem Fatafta

In late August and early September, Palestinian entrepreneurs and our supporters around the globe were involved in an effort to raise awareness about PayPal's inadvertent complicity with discrimination against Palestinians. While PayPal has still not committed to making the necessary changes, we believe our efforts have been noticed. We hope to continue to nudge it in the right direction so that PayPal will make the right decision to serve all people who live in the West Bank and Gaza.

At this time, PayPal does not serve Palestinians. It does, however, serve the Israeli settlers living among us. This situation, where PayPal is in Palestine but only serves the privileged Israeli settler population, results in outright discrimination that hinders opportunities for Palestine's tech sector.

Without PayPal, tech startup companies are at a distinct disadvantage. Although other payment portals are available, PayPal is the most trusted and reputable option in the MENA region, which is the target market for most Palestinian IT products. Without PayPal, Palestinian companies lose customers and/or revenues as they are forced to rely on traditional, cumbersome, and expensive bank transfers.

These constraints on the tech sector are particularly troublesome as tech is one of

the only sectors with potential to grow under the status-quo conditions of the Israeli occupation. Given that IT products do not require many physical inputs or have to cross physical borders, they are less impacted by Israel's severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinian goods and people and access to natural resources such as land and water. These debilitating restrictions have resulted in destabilizing unemployment rates of 17 percent in the West Bank and 41 percent in Gaza. A 2013 report by Portland Trust, however, noted: "By 2030 the [IT] sector could expand as much as nine-fold, to approximately \$960m in output and directly employ up to 20,000 people in high-skilled jobs."

PayPal's complicity with discrimination is particularly surprising given its record of commitment to human rights and equality. In North Carolina, PayPal scrapped plans to build a major operations center to protest recent passage of legislation (HB2) that invalidates legal protections for the LGBT community. Given its commitment to equal rights in North Carolina, we expect PayPal to be similarly committed to equal rights and access in Palestine.

The effort to raise PayPal's awareness on this issue began in August 2016 with a public letter that was sent to PayPal CEO Dan Schulman and signed by forty Palestinian startups, companies, and organizations. Simultaneously, a press release was sent out to hundreds of journalists. The Palestinian startup community then initiated two tweetstorms that generated thousands of #PayPal4Palestine tweets and millions of views. As a result of all these activities, 17 media outlets wrote about the issue, including premier tech publications such as *TechCrunch* and *Motherboard*.

Although PayPal has still not publicly commented on our campaign or the issue of extending access, we are certain that our public campaign has been noticed. We are committed to continuing to raise this issue until PayPal commits to extending service to all residents of the West Bank and Gaza regardless of their ethnic or religious identity.

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