



I Choose You, Palestine

By Reem Masrouji Bseiso



*chose you my homeland, lovingly and willingly;
I chose you my homeland, secretly and publicly."*

Excerpt from "I Chose You, My Homeland," a poem written by Mahmoud Darwish and sung by Marcel Khalife

These words are the inspiration behind the slogan for the initiative to support Palestinian national products: I Choose You, Palestine. We started the initiative with the Palestinian Society for Consumer Protection (PCP); "we" includes mothers, fathers, institutions, students, manufacturers, supermarkets, and people from all walks of life who have gathered to support Palestinian-made products by highlighting Palestine's little-known quality products and great factories.

إني اخترتك
يا وطني



Photo by PalTrade.

Our initiative is an integral part of all the boycott initiatives that have begun in Palestine since the first Intifada. The difference this time is that, first, we take a positive approach to reaching consumers. Instead of telling them to boycott, beware, and avoid the occupation's products, we encourage them to reach for and give priority to Palestinian national products. Secondly, we want consumers to choose national products out of their awareness and knowledge, not as an emotional reaction. And thirdly, we want to encourage voluntary work through motivating people "to give part of themselves" to spread the word and be able to fulfil the goals of raising consciousness and instilling pride in our products.

As a community, we are used to criticising our national products and deem them inferior. We somehow glorify imported and Israeli goods as superior products that are *worthy of our trust and selection*. The fact is, however, that the great majority of our factories are up to standard and even better in many cases than their Israeli equivalents; that is despite the many challenges that our manufacturers face, including the lack of adequate facilities.

We want consumers to decide at the time of purchase that they want to give priority to the national product; it must be their first choice at all times.

One of the very few choices that the occupation has not taken away from us is the freedom to choose which products and services to buy. Our initiative encourages people to use this freedom correctly and purchase the Palestinian product as a first choice, not only because it is a patriotic act, but also because Palestinian-made products are of high quality and worthy of our trust and selection.

During the first Intifada people tried to do whatever they could to resist the occupation and thus began the first movements of boycotting the occupation's products. They had a very basic approach at the time; they would punish the grocery stores and food markets that insisted on selling Israeli products. We all remember the acts of dumping Israeli-made milk and juice in the streets. Soon

after the Intifada ended, people went back to buying Israeli products. The notion of boycott at the time was not an act of knowledge, awareness, and consciousness, it was a reaction to fear. During the brutal war on Gaza this summer, many people also boycotted the occupation products. But as soon as the war ended and pictures of children being killed and homes being destroyed were no longer shown on TV, many of us turned back to buying the products, as if nothing had happened. Once again, boycott was not an act of awareness. This lack of sustainability of the boycott is due in major part to the fragile sense of patriotism. Other boycott movements started to realise this and began to focus on awareness raising. Our goal today is that every person reach a level of conviction that necessitates the choosing of Palestinian national products, a complete awareness of the consequences of buying or not buying national products.

Why do we have to buy the national product?

In the words of Gibran Khalil Gibran: "Pity the nation that wears a cloth it does not weave and eats a bread it does not harvest."

Buying national products does not just fill the patriotic void, it also contributes greatly to the Palestinian economy. Supporting national industry, agriculture, tourism, and services results in creating more jobs and reducing unemployment. It contributes directly to the GDP and the state's treasury, which pays salaries, creates development, reduces dependency on international aid, and consequently helps achieve real independence in the future. Students, in particular, need to understand that buying the national product will help them find jobs when they grow up. They need to know that if they support their national product they are actually supporting

themselves. Buying national products is not just a patriotic act or an economic necessity, it is also a personal necessity that is in the interest of each one of us.

We have many products that are a source of pride: paints, plastic, aluminium, shoes, pharmaceuticals, foods and sweets, chocolate, dairy products, farms, agricultural products, stone, steel works, construction material, etc. Even mushrooms were recently produced, in addition to olive oil, pickles, aromatic plants, embroidery, and handicrafts.

There are many consumers who prefer to buy the national product, but when they are at the supermarket, they can become confused because of the wide selection of foreign alternatives that surround the national products. Part of our initiative, then, is to label the national product with the logo to help lead interested consumers to their preferred national items.

Our initiative aims to work with various parts of the consumer circle: the manufacturer, the consumer, the point of sale, and even the media. In this way we will create a wholesome package that takes all aspects into consideration. It is like "connecting the dots." Creating the connection will help support everybody.

We are calling on interested people to join us and to help in supporting the national product in a spirit of pride and conviction. Let us hold hands and shout out loud: "I Choose You, Palestine."

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