

Palestinians' plight in Gaza should prick conscience of humanity, regardless of religion



By [Md. Mahmudul Hasan](#) - December 26, 2023 @ 1:13pm



Residents of the refugee camp of Bureij arrive in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip following an evacuation order, on December 22, 2023. - AFP pic

RECENTLY, I passed by a McDonald's outlet in Kuala Lumpur and found only a handful of people eating or buying food from there.

None of the female customers were in hijab or tudung, which may indicate that they were presumably non-Muslims.

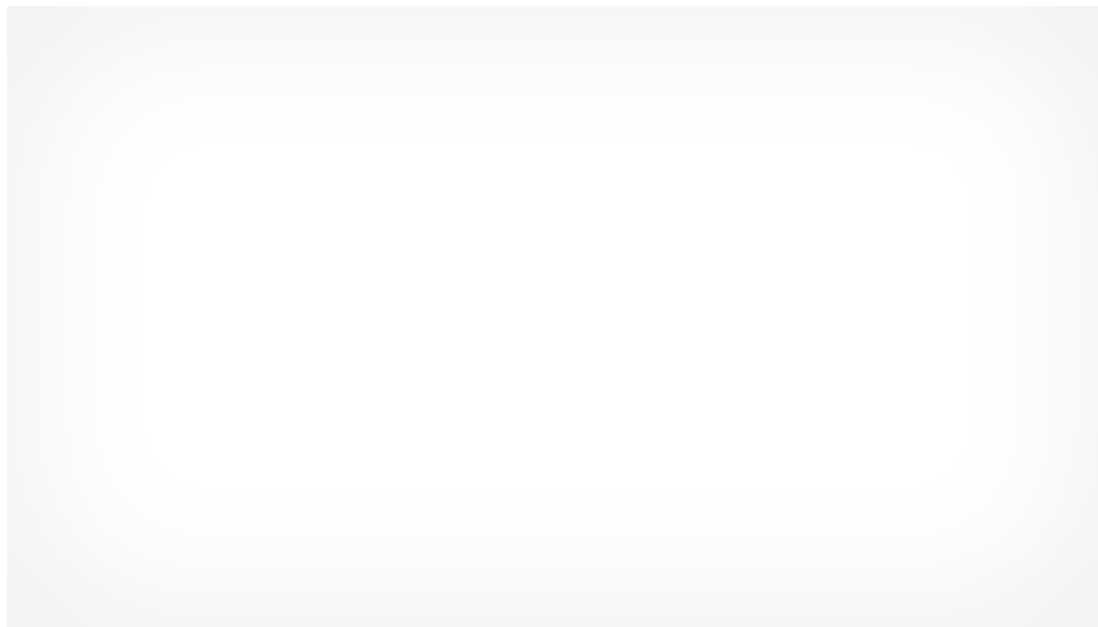
Before Oct 7, 2023, the outlet used to have long queues of people – both Muslims and non-Muslims, hijab-wearing and non-hijab-wearing – making and collecting orders.

What I gathered is that, because of Israel's genocidal killings and other human rights violations in Gaza, Muslims have largely been boycotting McDonald's because of its putative link with the Jewish state.

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In other words, the proponents and supporters of what is known as the BDS – Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions – movement have been pursuing practical measures with some teeth to force Israel to end its carnage in Gaza.



I am not a consumerist. I usually don't go to fast food outlets, irrespective of their Israeli links or lack thereof. My family and I prepare food at home as we believe it is more hygienic and strengthens the family bond. That is to say, the BDS movement does not influence my life in a big way.



I have also noticed that, during Israel's previous atrocities, people boycotted certain brands for their Israeli connections. But with time they forget and go back to them time and again. As a result, they fail to hurt Israel economically.

My aim in this article is not to discuss the effectiveness – or otherwise – of the BDS movement. I am trying to explore why, especially in Malaysia, Muslims feel hurt by the pain and suffering of Palestinians and boycott Israeli-linked businesses, and why non-Muslims in the country apparently feel indifferent even to the gravest of human tragedies in Palestine.

I don't think all non-Muslims who do not bother about Israel's mayhem in Palestine are cruel and inhumane people. Nor do I believe that they are unable to seriously empathise with the feelings or emotions of other human beings.

Non-Muslims' indifference to the horrible conditions of Palestinians (most of whom are Muslims) can be explained by either or both of the following hypotheses:

1) Most non-Muslims are victims of the ubiquitous Islamophobic rhetoric that associates Muslims with negative stereotypes.

As a result, they have wrong perceptions about Muslims – including those in Palestine – whose pain does not warrant their sympathy and concern.

2) Muslims' solidarity for Palestinians is largely based on emotion and not on knowledge and information.

Therefore, they are not intellectually equipped to educate and create awareness among others who are regularly fed with media stereotypes and distortions about Muslims as well as Palestinians.

In either case, the onus is on the (Muslim) proponents of justice for Palestinians. They must be well-informed and confident enough to reach out to others with knowledge and information.

The same remedy should apply to the menace of Islamophobia. Educated Muslims must understand Islam and Muslim-related issues thoroughly so that they can explain them to others and answer relevant questions or criticisms.

In some of my earlier articles, I have argued that justice for Palestinians is a humanitarian question, not a religious one.

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-72) was a Polish-born American rabbi and Jewish religious scholar; the British novelist Harold Pinter (1930-2008) and the world-renowned linguist and public intellectual Noam Chomsky (1928-) are of Jewish background.

All of them are in favour of justice for Palestinians. Needless to say, there are many people inside Israel who are opposed to the mistreatment and dehumanisation of Palestinians by the Israeli government.

Evidently, the campaign for freedom and justice for Palestinians transcends religious boundaries. In what follows, I describe an episode to focus on the human dimension of the Palestinian story.

The BBC journalist David Gritten's report entitled "Israel Gaza: 'Where is mum? Where is grandma? Where did they go?'" was published on the BBC website on Dec 12, 2023.

It is about 4-year-old Omar from Gaza who lost his limbs and 35 members of his family to an Israeli airstrike in early December 2023. Gritten describes Omar's condition in the following words:

"Omar had to have his left hand amputated and was left with a large, open wound on his right leg, smaller wounds on his chest and face, and a dislocated jaw following an Israeli airstrike that killed 35 members of his family, including his mother, father and grandmother."



A McDonald's fast food restaurant. - AFP pic

Because of the airstrike, Omar's face was so terribly distorted that it was difficult to look at him. Omar's cousin Moein Abu Rezk is his only surviving relative who hopes that Omar will be evacuated from Gaza for proper treatment.

Omar's is not an isolated case. As of Dec 21, 2023, Israeli forces killed about 20,000 men, women and children – injuring another 50,000 – in Gaza since Oct 7, 2023.

As I am writing this article, the number of casualties keeps growing. Gaza is full of unclaimed children and with no properly functioning hospital.

It seems that death from Israeli airstrikes is better than injury, as Israel attacks and destroys hospitals and thus deprives the injured of medical attention.

Omar's story is not a religious one. It is a human story. It is wrong for some human beings to kill other human beings unlawfully.

It is wrong for some human beings to illegally occupy the land of other human beings. It is wrong for the powerful to force a people to live under an apartheid regime.

Omar's cries and questions: 'Where is mum? Where is grandma? Where did they go?' – should hurt all of us, whether we are Muslims or non-Muslims.

Let's stand up for truth and justice irrespective of the identities of the perpetrators and victims of injustices.

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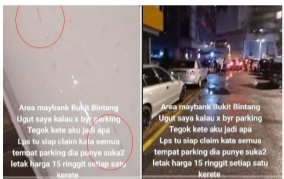




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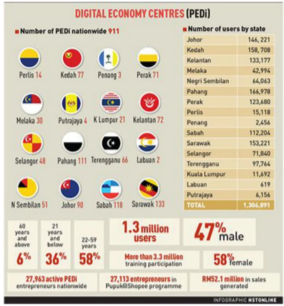
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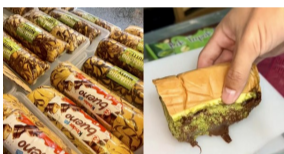
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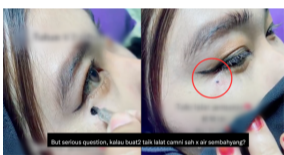
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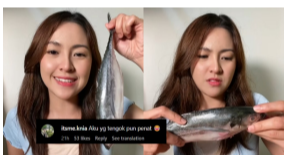
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