

**Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc**

## Ben & Jerry's claims Unilever 'silenced' it over support for Palestinian refugees

Owner rejects accusation it breached agreement allowing the brand to pursue its own social mission



Allegations mark latest step in long-running disagreement between consumer goods group and ice cream brand over Israel and Palestine © Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images

**Madeleine Speed** in London YESTERDAY

Ben & Jerry's has claimed Unilever threatened to dismantle its independent board and "silenced" the brand over its support for Palestinian refugees, in the latest legal flare-up between the ice cream brand and its parent company.

In a legal complaint filed in the US district court for the southern district of New York on Wednesday, [Ben & Jerry's](#) alleged that Unilever had breached its agreement to allow the brand to pursue its own "social mission" by preventing it from calling for a ceasefire in Gaza or voicing support for refugees.

Anuradha Mittal, chair of Ben & Jerry's independent board, said: "For four decades, Ben & Jerry's has remained steadfast in our commitment to social justice. Unilever's intimidation will not waiver the company's commitment."

The allegations in the New York lawsuit mark the latest step in a [long-running disagreement](#) between the London-listed consumer goods group and its ice cream brand over Israel and Palestine.

In 2022, Ben & Jerry's [sued Unilever](#) after the company blocked its attempts to stop selling ice cream in the occupied territories by disposing of the Israeli arm of the brand to a local licensee. In December that year, Unilever said the dispute had been

resolved.

Speaking to the Financial Times in January, Mittal [called for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza](#). Ben & Jerry's the brand remained silent on the issue.

Ben & Jerry's has now claimed that Unilever threatened to dismantle the independent board and sue individual members if the brand issued a ceasefire statement alongside the panel.

According to the Wednesday filing, in December 2023 Ben & Jerry's management and the board informed Unilever of their plans to issue a statement.

The filing then claims that Unilever responded with the threats, as well as personal calls from the president of Unilever's ice cream division, Peter ter Kulve, and head of litigation, Jeff Eglash, "who attempted to intimidate Ben & Jerry's personnel with professional reprisals if the company issued a ceasefire statement".

Ben & Jerry's also alleged that its parent company breached the terms of the settlement in the previous lawsuit over the occupied territories.

As part of the settlement, Unilever promised to make \$5mn in payments for Ben & Jerry's to human rights organisations of its choosing.

In Wednesday's filing, Ben & Jerry's claimed that Unilever blocked it from donating to non-governmental organisation Jewish Voice for Peace on the basis that it was too critical of the Israeli administration.

It added: "Despite its contractual commitment to "[r]espect and acknowledge" the independent board's primary responsibility over Ben & Jerry's social mission and essential brand integrity, Unilever has silenced each of these efforts."

Unilever said: "Our heart goes out to all victims of the tragic events in the Middle East. We reject the claims made by B & J's social mission board, and we will defend our case very strongly. We would not comment further on this legal matter."

In March this year, Unilever announced it was [splitting off its ice cream business](#), which includes Ben & Jerry's, as well as brands such as Magnum and Wall's.

