

Rebuilding Alliance

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Fresh Herbs from Gaza to New York City: Asking Congress to take tangible, immediate action to ease the emergency and put Gazans back to work

Trip Report: NYC and Washington DC, March 22-April 1, 2019

Executive Summary:

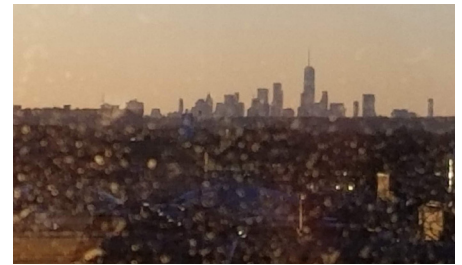
Children are going hungry in the Gaza Strip. All U.S. Government humanitarian aid to the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem stopped as of January 31st. The economic situation in Gaza, already in 'free-fall' last September per the World Bank analysis, is now in crisis as over 55% of the population is unemployed. For young women under 30, unemployment is now over 90%, and for young men under 30, it is in the 70th percentile. In mid-March, thousands of Palestinians took to the streets with the slogan, #WeWantToLive, only to be brutally beaten by the regime in power. This is an important time to show that Americans care.

At the request of **Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations** in Gaza along with **independent** businesses, Rebuilding Alliance, a US non-profit organization, brought a trade delegation to meet with Congress to explore ways to generate jobs in the agriculture sector, starting with greenhouses that would grow fresh herbs for export. Our delegation included Mr. Mohammed Khader, owner of Lausanne Trading Consultants Company in Ramallah, who is chair of the Palestinian Freight Forwarders and Customs Brokers Association and also represents the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization, facilitating the COGAT and Israeli Customs approvals, customs clearance and delivery of donations to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He is Rebuilding Alliance's shipping agent for delivery of 35,600 solar lights to Gaza's children to date and he currently air freights fresh herbs from the West Bank to New York City, five days a week.

During 5 days of visits in DC, our delegation met with 54 offices including 22 Republican offices. We asked them to make two calls, one to the U.S. State Department and the other to the Israeli Embassy, to request assurance that the borders will remain open for shipments of perishables, specifically fresh herbs. We met with four Members of Congress in person, including dinner. Overall we were well-received.

Growers in Gaza require two things to plant their greenhouses and hire 150 women (the most impacted sector) as workers: 1) a promise from Israeli Civil Administration that they will allow pallets of fresh herbs to ship through Erez whenever the Karem Shalom shipping terminal is shut down, and 2) Buyers. Following our meetings with Congress, we visited the Hunt's Point Produce Market, the largest in the world, to meet the Israeli-American importer who will contract for the fresh herbs from Gaza, to be air-shipped 5 days per week direct flights from Ben Gurion Airport to NYC. **He is ready to contract for purchase but notes that because these crops are so fragile, the entire supply chain will shut down if daily shipments are interrupted.** We also met with the Palestinian owner of a large produce market who is ready to buy.

Will Israel guarantee that fresh herbs can cross for export? Rebuilding Alliance asked Congressional offices to get an answer from the Israeli Government no later than April 15th, to allow the Gaza growers to plant fresh herbs in time for the summer market opportunity in New York City, when other suppliers stop.



Our Goal: To strengthen Gaza's NGO & private sector by bringing jobs.

Our Objective: Sell fresh herbs from Gaza growers to importers in New York City for distribution to buyers along the northeastern corridor in grocery stores and fine restaurants.



We met with senior staff at fifty-four House and Senate offices to ask them to make two calls: (1) to the U.S. State Department; and (2) to the Israeli Embassy.

Why? Because, if buyers can be found, private growers in Gaza will hire 150 unemployed women and plant fresh herbs for the New York market if a way can be found to assure that these perishable herbs will be allowed out each day, 5 days/week — even when Israel closes the crossings.





Our private, non-governmental initiative was welcomed in every office — especially in states and districts known for agriculture!



Congressional staff promised to raise the issue to their boss and do their best to make their calls — so, we drove back to NYC, to meet with importers and find buyers.

Success: Buyers are ready. If the Israeli Government will assure that fresh herbs will cross, even when they close the gates, the growers will plant.



Permission from the Israeli Government is requested no later than April 15th to give Gaza growers the opportunity to meet New York's summer market.



If the gates will remain open, there are many more steps ahead to bring these products to market:

- GlobalGap Certification and 4 party audits
- Packaging design
- Organic certification
- Kosher certification
- Fair trade certification
- Trade fairs and marketing initiatives to famous chefs

It all starts with the gates — so we're asking Congress' help to give this private, non-governmental initiative wings.

