

Prof.: Denying Me the Israel Prize Is Delegitimization of Left

Presidents of Israeli universities rebuke Israeli Education Minister Yoav Gallant for withholding the prize from Prof. Oded Goldreich over his alleged support for BDS. 'If I supported BDS I would not have agreed to accept the prize,' he says

[Or Kashti](#)

Apr. 11, 2021

The researcher whose receipt of this year's Israel Prize in mathematics and computer science was countermanded by the education minister said Yoav Gallant's decision was "another small step in the delegitimization of the left in Israel." [Prof. Oded Goldreich](#) said that Gallant's move to deny him the prize constituted "political persecution."

Goldreich made the comment after Thursday's [High Court of Justice ruling](#) giving Gallant 30 days to justify his decision. The professor will not

Gallant claims Goldreich supports the [BDS movement](#), despite Goldreich's insistence that he does not.

The education minister said Friday that Israel must check if Goldreich's renunciation of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement is "sincere" before he awarding him the prize.

Goldreich called this a "political investigation" adding that Gallant wants "to prevent me from receiving the prize because of my opinions, because I am a leftist. There is nothing else."

Gallant tweeted Friday that the Israel Prize is "the most prestigious honor Israel can bestow. Anyone who does not hold the State of Israel and its laws close to their heart does not deserve the Israel Prize."

He further stated that Goldreich may be "a brilliant scientist," but that by supporting the BDS movement, he "spits in the face of the State of Israel and Israeli academia, and may even be breaking the law."

Gallant said he would "complete (an) investigation into whether the professor's renunciation of the boycott movement is sincere and if the information he gave the court and the state is correct," saying that he "will not contribute to a boycott supporter standing on a stage on Independence Day and receiving a prize from the heads of state."

“Minister Gallant is looking for excuses: for weeks he has been opposed to my receiving the prize,” Goldreich told Haaretz. “First it was because of statements about the army, but that was struck down as irrelevant. Then it was claimed that I support BDS but then it turns out that I do not.”

Goldreich said that Gallant’s accusation was “strange” because “If I supported BDS I would not have agreed to accept the prize, I would have had to boycott it.”

Goldreich said that Gallant “dug and dug until he found petitions that I signed 13 years ago.” A claim that Goldreich had called for a boycott of Ariel University in the West Bank “was born a day before the hearing in the High Court.”

Goldreich will speak at a small alternative ceremony at the Weizmann Institute Monday, where the vice president of the Israel Academy of Sciences, Prof. David Harel, will hand him the statuette of the Israel Prize he had received in the past. At the ceremony he intends to quote statements his lawyer, Michael Sfar, made in the High Court hearing on Thursday: “Withholding the prize is an attempt to determine – even by allusion – that anyone who opposes the settlement project and all assistance to it, is not a legitimate part of Israeli society.”

Sfar said in response to the High Court ruling: “The attorney general, together with the education minister, devised a clearly McCarthyist path to prevent (awarding) the Israel Prize to those with anti-occupation views.”

The presidents of all the Israeli universities released a joint letter Friday, calling on Gallant to rescind his objection to awarding Goldreich the prize. “Denying a person a prize due to his political beliefs contradicts the basic principle of the Israel Prize and severely harms free speech and free thought,” the letter said. “Your decision creates the difficult impression that only those who ‘toe the line’ will be rewarded, and anyone who dares to express a political opinion that is outside of the consensus will be punished,” they concluded.

However, the presidents clarified that they do not agree with Prof. Goldreich’s political stance. “Our statement is not out of political identification with Prof. Goldreich’s statements. Rather, with regards to his statements, we are of a different opinion. However, we believe that it is his right, as a person who lives in a democratic nation, to express his opinion without fear and without trepidation,” the letter said.