

Opinion |

# I'll Keep Doing All I Can for the Fight to End the Occupation

[Oded Goldreich](#)

Apr. 13, 2022 6:47 PM

[Minor corrections of the translation by OG]

A little over a year ago, the Israel Prize committee for mathematics and computer science selected me as the recipient of the prize for the Hebrew year 5781 (2020-2021). At the time, I didn't know that I'd been chosen; I didn't even know that I'd been nominated. The Israel Prize rules stipulate that the education minister is supposed to call the winners and inform them that they have been awarded the prize.

Instead, I received phone calls from journalists informing me of my non-win (of the prize I didn't know I was supposed to receive). But more importantly, the journalists told me that I would not be receiving the prize because I support Israel's enemies and the BDS movement, which -- as I have since clarified numerous times -- is not true.

Over the past year and a half, ministers, lawmakers, right-wing organizations and journalists have said a lot of things about me, most of them false. Mostly, they [said that I call for a boycott of Israel](#).

Up to now, I have refrained from responding publicly, but I wish to state very plainly: I have never called for a boycott of Israel. In the past, I, like many others, have supported – and will continue to support in the future – the withholding of any aid to the settlement project in the West Bank, because I think that it endangers Israel's survival and rests upon the oppression of the local population in these territories. In particular, the institution that calls itself Ariel University is a part of this project, and even if a certain education minister managed to get the Council for Higher Education to (retroactively) recognize it as “an Israeli institution of higher education,” this does not change the fact that it is not located within Israel's sovereign borders.

This is not merely a geographical question of physical location, but a question related to politics and governance: The institution in Ariel is situated in a territory where there is a split system with extensive privileges and governmental support

for a minority of inhabitants – the Israeli settlers – and oppression and ongoing, extreme dispossession for the other inhabitants – the Palestinian population.

These are basic facts that cannot be ignored fairly. Acknowledgement of the facts is the basis for debating the justification for and future of this regime. In my opinion, this regime ought to disappear, i.e. the occupation needs to end. The fact that I hold these views is the real reason that right-wing groups, which are dedicated to hounding leftists, and two education ministers who grovel before such groups, tried to prevent me from being awarded the Israel Prize.

My signature on this or that document was merely an excuse, as evidenced by the fact that the identity of the “incriminating” documents changed in the course of the legal proceeding. The real reason behind the effort to deny me the Israel Prize is not a specific call for action, but my political views. These elements do not want someone with views like mine to receive this honor from the state, whether it’s because he is involved in what’s referred to as “calling for a boycott” or whether he is “only” working to end the occupation by other means. These legitimate positions are framed by the right as anti-Israel, and people who support these legitimate positions are labeled as enemies of the state and of Israeli society.

This false framing is bolstered by [the “BDS Law” that was enacted in 2011](#), and which maliciously and misleadingly equates the boycott of an institution “situated in an area under Israeli control” with “a boycott of Israel.” This law barely passed the test of the High Court, although in my opinion it should have failed, primarily because of the slippery slope that it creates for damaging freedom of expression, a slope down which we slid in the present incident.

But even that law does not say that calling for a boycott of settlement institutions, like the institution in Ariel, makes a person an enemy of the state. Nor does the law say that issuing such a call is a criminal offense. All the law says is that such a call could amount to a civil tort and that those harmed by it would be eligible to sue for damages if they incurred provable harm, and that someone who calls for a boycott may be ineligible for certain administrative benefits; but it says nothing about withholding an award from that person.

From a personal standpoint, it was a year full of disappointment: by two education ministers, [Yoav Gallant](#) (from whom, granted, I did not expect much), and [Dr. Yifat Shasha-Biton](#), from whom I expected more. I was disappointed in the former attorney general for letting this story even get to the Supreme Court, and I was disappointed that the affair did not end by the first High Court decision last spring.

Nevertheless, I do not regret anything. To my delight, this uproar drew attention to my field of research that it probably would not have otherwise received. I received lots of personal and professional support and encouragement from all around, and was not subjected to the type of intense attacks that my leftist comrades often experience. I was pleased to have the opportunity to fight for something I believe in, even if I was dragged into this fight and it was not my own doing. I am glad that this affair concluded with the reversal of the two ministers' decisions, and I hope that this conclusion helps to strengthen freedom of political expression in Israel.

As I said [during the prize ceremony](#), the story of Israel's creation is not complete without noting the price that another people paid for the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, and this state's moral duty to try to compensate that other people and not persist in its oppression. We, of course, are doing the opposite, and the continued oppression greatly saddens me.

As for myself, I shall continue to do all I can for the sake of the fight to end the occupation, for the sake of genuine equality for all of the state's inhabitants and for social justice. Therefore, I intend to divide the prize money among five organizations that are resolutely working toward these goals: B'tselem, Breaking the Silence, Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, Kav LaOved – Worker's Hotline, and Standing Together.

*The writer is the Israel Prize recipient in mathematics and computer science for the Jewish year 5781.*