

Left-wing Professor Receives Israel Prize After Year-long Saga

'The story is incomplete without noting the price that another nation paid for our rebirth,' Professor Goldreich said in the ceremony, after the Israel Prize was withheld from him over his support for a boycott of a West Bank university

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Professor Oded Goldreich was presented the Israel Prize on Monday for his work in mathematics and computer sciences, ending a year-long bid to block its award over what Israel's education ministers dubbed as support for boycotting Ariel University, located in the West Bank.

Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton decided to [snub](#) the ceremony, after her decision to withhold the prize from Goldreich was overturned by Israel's High Court. The head of prizes at the ministry, David Felber, instead presented him with the award.

At the ceremony, Goldreich used his acceptance speech to address the political situation underlying the year-long saga: "I want to add something slightly political. The story is incomplete without noting the price that another nation paid for the rebirth [of our nation], and without [noting] our moral commitment to try our utmost to compensate and not to oppress another nation. We, of course, are doing the opposite."

Goldreich, a Professor of Computer Science at the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science of Weizmann Institute of Science, originally declined to participate in the prize ceremony on Independence Day, meaning an alternative ceremony was rearranged at the Education Ministry. Although Yifat Shasha-Biton tested positive for coronavirus on Sunday and could not attend the ceremony, she had already decided that she will not attend it.

In April 2021, then-Education Minister Yoav Gallant denied Goldreich the prize over his signature on a letter supporting a boycott of Ariel University, based in the West Bank, a decision which was upheld by Shasha-Biton. Her refusal to grant Goldreich the prize was based on his "calls for the boycott of an academic institution in Israel," she said.

Last month, Israel's High Court [ruled](#) that the cabinet minister overstepped her authority in intervening in the decisions of a professional prize jury.

According to Yael Willner, who wrote the majority 2-1 High Court ruling: "Over the years the Israel Prize has been awarded to various people, who have voiced expressions of bitterness, disparagement and insults to portions of the public in the context of their ethnic origin, their religious views and their sexual orientation in unpleasant, harsh and hurtful ways.

Despite these harsh comments by the candidates, successive education ministers have not found it proper to [withhold the Israel Prize](#) from them.”

Justice Amit wrote that linking the Israel Prize to the willingness of the minister at that time is a “sure recipe for [politicization of the prize](#).” According to Amit, “the boundaries of the minister’s authority have been outlined in a ruling regarding the Israel Prize, and the education minister, in her decision in this case, has exceeded them.”

Israel, as a country that “lives on its excellence in various fields, might thus be vulnerable to real damage in academic and professional achievements and in the long run, even harm to its national strength,” Amit wrote.