

# *Netherlands Rejects Request to Ban Boycott of Israel*

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Amsterdam, May 27 (RHC)-- The Netherlands has rejected calls by Israel to declare illegal a growing international campaign that calls for the boycott of Israeli products. Foreign Minister Bert Koenders said on Thursday the Dutch government has explained to Tel Aviv that people joining the campaign was an issue of free speech, to which the Dutch people are entitled.

Netherlands is the second country in the European Union to have announced its support for people's right to join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel.

"Statements or meetings concerning BDS are protected by freedom of expression and freedom of assembly as enshrined in the Dutch Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights," Koenders said. The Dutch Ambassador to Israel Gilles Beschoor Plug defended Koender's remarks, saying that joining the campaign in Holland "is not illegal and therefore it falls within the limits of freedom."

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nachshon denounced the decision, saying there had to be "limits" on the concept of freedom of speech. Israel has been pressuring the US and European countries to introduce legislation and take other repressive measures to confront the BDS movement.

In February, Britain introduced new rules, banning local authorities and public-sector organizations from boycotting Israel and pledging severe penalties for violators.

Sweden, however, supported the right to join the BDS in March 2016, saying the movement is "a civil society movement" and that "governments should not interfere in civil society organization views." Earlier this month, more than 300 groups in Europe urged the EU to hold Israel accountable for its human rights violations and join the global campaign for boycott of Israeli products.

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