

European Court of Human Rights backs BDS activists convicted in France



Brussels, June 15 (RHC)-- The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ruled that France violated the rights of 11 pro-Palestinian activists when it convicted them for campaigning against Israeli goods, and has ordered the government to pay damages.

The criminal conviction against the activists with the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement "had no relevant and sufficient grounds," the ECHR said in its ruling, arguing that their basic right to freedom of expression had been violated. The court ordered France to pay ?101,000 (\$115,000) in compensation to the activists.

The case dates back to 2009 when a group of protesters led by French activist Jean-Michel Baldassi staged a demonstration in a hypermarket in the eastern French town of Illzach. The group handed out leaflets calling for various forms of boycott against Israel in response to its treatment of Palestinians and occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Israel has long claimed that the movement is driven by anti-Semitism and a desire to deny Israel's right to exist. The French authorities charged the BDS activists with incitement to economic discrimination, and

promoting racism and anti-Semitism.

France's highest court of appeals upheld the sentence in 2015. The defendants were each handed down a suspended fine of ?1,000 (\$1,133) and ordered to pay a total of ?13,000 (\$14,730) in legal fees and donations to organizations promoting French-Israeli friendship and combating anti-Semitism.

In its latest ruling, the ECHR concluded that the activists had every right to express their views as long as they did not promote violence, hatred or intolerance. France was ordered to pay ?27,380 (\$31,150) to each campaigner – a decision which it is bound to comply with as a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The BDS movement and Amnesty International hailed the ruling as a landmark decision that would help prevent the use of anti-discrimination laws to prosecute activists campaigning against human rights violations committed by Israel against Palestinians.

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