

French police arrest head of Palestine solidarity group, ban pro-Palestine rally

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President of L'Association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS) Bertrand Heilbronn is seen during his arrest outside the French foreign ministry in Paris on May 12, 2021. (Photo by AFPS)

Paris, May 14 (RHC)-- Police in France have arrested the head of a Palestine solidarity organization after putting a ban on a Paris rally against Israel's atrocities.

French security forces arrested Bertrand Heilbronn as he left the foreign ministry in Paris, according to L'Association France-Palestine Solidarité, AFPS, the group of which he is president. “The Paris Police Prefecture, in an unprecedented move, had prohibited the rally, although there had never been the slightest problem with the demonstrations that we had always organized in cooperation with the authorities,” AFPS said in a statement.

Heilbronn, who is 71 years old, had been at a meeting with officials as part of a civil society delegation before being detained, according to the U.S.-based Electronic Intifada, an online publication covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Elsa Faucillon, a member of the French parliament, posted a video on her Twitter account of Heilbronn surrounded by police forces as he left the foreign ministry, adding that he was arrested over organizing the pacifist rally in support of Palestine. She and several other legislators had attended the meeting.

AFPS said that it had cooperated with the decision to ban the rally, with Heilbronn and the leaders of other participating groups on hand “to inform those who arrived at the rally site that it had been prohibited, and to guarantee that the events proceeded as well as possible.”

However, the group said, Heilbronn was detained upon exiting the foreign ministry and was taken to a police station where he was handcuffed to a bench. Late Wednesday night, AFPS tweeted that he had “finally been released.”

“The prohibition of this demonstration leads us to conclude – as we already were aware – that freedom of expression and public liberties are in danger in our country,” AFPS said. “But this arrest forces us to state that a threshold has been crossed.”

The group further noted that its members across France would be joining with other solidarity groups for rallies across the European country scheduled to be held in the coming days. “Dictatorial methods will not prevent us from doing this,” it said.

On Thursday, AFPS said in a statement that the interior ministry “will have to explain itself” over the detention of Heilbronn, stressing that Paris must also end “these repeated and scandalous attacks on liberty of expression and demonstration.”

Despite its pretensions of being a bastion of free speech, France is one of the most repressive countries in the world against supporters of Palestinian rights, Electronic Intifada said.

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