

Canadian authorities rule West-Bank wines cannot be labeled 'Product of Israel'



Ottawa, July 30 (RHC)-- Wines made and manufactured in illegal Israeli settlements within Palestine will not be sold in Canada under the label "product of Israel." The judgment was issued by a Canadian Federal Court, ruling against a 2017 decision.

"Product of Israel labels on wines from illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are false, misleading and deceptive," the presiding judge, Anne Mactavish, wrote in a 43-page statement explaining the decision.

The verdict was in favor of David Kattenburg, an activist who had filed a complaint in October 2017 with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), arguing that such a label is incorrect as the wines in question are produced in Palestine.

On May 2019, the court accepted to hear Kattenburg's lawsuit where he testified that he traveled to the West Bank and saw the Palestinians living under what he described as "permanent military occupation and apartheid."

"I initiated this CFIA complaint to help ensure respect for Canada's consumer protection and product labelling laws, to help ensure that I and other Canadian wine consumers be provided truthful and accurate information about the wine products that we purchase and consume, and to ensure both Canada's and Israel's respect for international human rights and humanitarian law," he added.

Kattenburg, who was supported by the Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJVC), an organization advocating for a just peace in Israel-Palestine, added that he believes Canadians should be able to make informed choices, "based on truthful product labeling, about whether they wish to purchase settlement wines and other settlement products".

"The labeling of settlement wines on Canadian store shelves as 'Product of Israel' facilitates Israel's de facto annexation of large portions of the West Bank" and that this is "an affront to [his] conscience as a Jewish person and to [his] commitment to the rule of law as a citizen of Canada," he added.

In 2017 the CFIA had ordered that wines with the label "Made in Israel" would be de-shelved but the decision had triggered widespread anger from pro-Israeli groups. The pressure forced the agency to step back after the government directed it to a free-trade agreement with Israel, which showed that the labeling was correct.

"A decision that allows Settlement Wines to be labeled as "Products of Israel" thus does not fall within the range of possible, acceptable outcomes which are defensible in respect of the facts and law," judge Mactavish said before she concluded that, "it is rather unreasonable."

The presiding judge also said that the court should not determine how West-Bank wines should be labeled, which is a matter for the CFIA.

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