

Weekly Report – Lafarge Trial, Paris Criminal Court *Hearings of 9-12 December, 2025*

Last week, the Paris Criminal Court continued to hear the testimonies from former employees of Lafarge Cement Syria (LCS), but also those of victims and relatives of victims of the 13 November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, and a representative of a Yazidi victims' association. These testimonies linked LCS's financial support to the Islamic State with the prejudice suffered by Lafarge Syrian employees, by victims of the terrorist attacks in France, and by the Yazidi community after the genocide perpetrated in 2014. The week concluded with the closing arguments of the lawyers representing the civil parties, excerpts of which will be cited in the second part of this report.

Compelling testimonies illustrating the consequences of Lafarge's financing of ISIS, including crimes committed in Syria, France, and against Yazidi communities

"These are the saddest, most exhausting moments of my life, and I lived them with Lafarge"
– F., former employee of LCS

Echoing the deeply distressing testimonies heard over the past two weeks, additional former Syrian employees of Lafarge took the stand to recount the terror of arbitrary arrests at checkpoints as well as the brutality of daily life in Manbij.

At a checkpoint D., a former LCS employee, recalled how several ISIS armed fighters boarded the bus to check IDs, interrogating employees for two hours before arresting two of them who were Christians. One of them, S., described the brutal arrest: *"I felt anesthetized, I couldn't understand what was happening around me."* He described that he was handcuffed behind his back and detained: *"We were given food once a day – when we were given food at all. We asked the guard why we were there. He told us we were going to die in there."* At one point, they were placed in a 30 m² room with at least 40 people: *"We couldn't sit. We couldn't sleep. We could only stand."*

When ISIS took control of Manbij in early 2014, the plaintiffs described crucified bodies publicly displayed for days on roundabouts. F. specified that employees were required to live in Manbij or risk losing a monthly allowance of 60,000 Syrian pounds, while he described the relentless regime bombardments of the city and their traumatic impact on his family: *"In October 2013, my eldest daughter was on a bus returning from school in the center of Manbij when a rocket landed 50 meters away. She came home crying and in shock."* He told the court that every time he left for work, he had to say goodbye to his daughters, knowing it might be the last time he saw them alive.

“Terrorism is never abstract. It takes shape in bodies, in families, in destroyed territories, in direct and fatal consequences” – Natia Navrouzov, Executive Director of Yazda

Natia Navrouzov, Executive Director of Yazda, an NGO documenting crimes committed against the Yazidi community by the Islamic State and supporting survivors, also addressed the Court: *“I am here to represent a community that has lived through the unthinkable.”* She provided a detailed account of the Islamic State’s attack on Mount Sinjar on 3 August 2014, an Iraqi region near the Syrian border, just a few hundred kilometers from the Lafarge-operated factory. Within days, thousands of men and women were executed. More than 90 mass graves containing their remains were later discovered. ISIS also abducted 6,000 women and children, at least two-thirds of whom were transferred to Syria, some near the Lafarge factory. Women and girls were subjected to repeated rape and sold in slave markets, while boys were forcibly indoctrinated. *“These lives matter. These lives deserve justice.”* she said to the Court.

She explained how foreseeable this attack on her people was: *“When Lafarge negotiated, paid, and maintained relationships with ISIS in 2013 and 2014, ISIS was not an abstraction. It was a group advancing village by village across Iraq and Syria, preparing what would become one of the most thoroughly documented genocides of the 21st century. Every transaction, every concession, every sum transferred by Lafarge contributed to strengthening a group that was simultaneously preparing and carrying out the extermination of a people.”* In early August 2014, while Lafarge was negotiating new agreements with ISIS, the attack against the Yazidi community was widely documented in numerous international reports, including by major French mainstream media outlets. On 7 August 2014, the President of the United States declared: *“If we do not act, these families face genocide.”* It could not have been ignored.

She concluded with powerful words: *“This trial is a message. For the Yazidis, it says: the world sees you. The world recognizes what happened to you. The world will not look away. For corporations, it says: responsibility does not stop at the gates of a factory. It follows the money, wherever it goes. For History, it says: we chose to pull the thread all the way through. And for the survivors we support every day, it says something even more important: your fight for justice is not in vain.”*

“Decisions made in your offices, hundreds of kilometers away, were transformed into Kalashnikov bullets, into blood, into lives irreparably shattered” – Camille, victim of the 13 November 2015 terrorist attacks

Gaëlle, a Bataclan survivor who lost her husband and was severely injured, drew a direct link between Lafarge’s payments and the 13 November 2015 attacks, recalling that Lafarge *“contributed to arming and strengthening the organization that attacked my body, destroyed my life, and killed my partner [...] It is in that precise moment, lying on the floor of the Bataclan,*

that abstract economic decisions become gunfire aimed at living bodies” and, while addressing the defendants directly, added: “what may seem to you like a line in a budget, an Excel spreadsheet, a compromise to preserve an activity, a ‘necessary’ agreement in a difficult context, becomes on the ground weapons, explosives, recruited, trained and financed men. It becomes death. It becomes my torn face. It becomes the loss of a father, a partner, a child, a brother, a friend.”

Another survivor, Camille, who was at the bar La Belle Équipe on the evening of 13 November 2015, when it was targeted by the terrorist attack, recalled that one of her first thoughts was for Syrian men and women, “*who go through this every day*”. She wondered: “*Did we really need to wait for the events of 13 November, when for months individuals had been subjected to violence and arbitrariness near the Lafarge factory?*” According to her, the violence she was a direct victim of “*did not emerge out of nowhere – it was prepared and financed. These men were heavily armed, able to rent safe houses, and fired methodically at us without missing a single centimeter of the terrace.*”

Philippe Duperron, representative of the 13onze15 association, which brings together relatives of victims of terrorism, concluded: “*If no one finances the Islamic State, there is no Islamic State. There are no means to train fighters, no combat, no attacks, no victims—and our children are still alive.*” He found the defendants’ defense, that they bear no responsibility for how the funds paid to ISIS were used, untenable: “*It is impossible to believe that this question never crossed their minds. And asking the question was already answering it.*”

Closing arguments of the civil parties’ lawyers

Lawyers representing former LCS employees

Élise Le Gall

“It falls to us to speak one final time on behalf of those whom some would like to erase from these proceedings [...] Because, as Mr. [N] and so many others have confided to me, what may have hurt them most was realizing that at the very moment when they most needed protection, the company they had served with loyalty had chosen... something else [...]

When the security situation deteriorated in Syria in 2012, they did not refuse to come to work. They did what simple, courageous, conscientious people do: they carried on. Some of those who testified told you so – not out of pride, but out of loyalty, not out of necessity. So when the expatriates were evacuated in 2012, and they were sent back to the plant, something difficult to put into words occurred. A crack. A first incomprehension. Then a doubt: “Why them, and not us?” They did not have the words. But they had the feeling – of being less protected. Less

valued. Less important. What they experienced was fear – but silent fear. During the hearings, we heard about kidnappings, threats and checkpoints. But what must be understood is not only the objective danger, but how that danger infiltrated their daily lives.

War is not only gunfire and explosions. It is the trembling hand when handing over identity papers to a terrorist armed group at a checkpoint on what had become a compulsory route to reach the plant. It is the breath that catches when a terrorist scans a name on a list of employees. It is the anguish of being ‘the next one’. Remember: “All it took was one wrong word to become that next one.” [...] Where are the former employees who might contradict what has been said here? Where are those whom the Defense could have called to say, “No, that is not how it happened”? There are none. Not a single one. The silence of those it could have called, on its own, speaks to the strength of this truth. [...]

Remember: every payment to an armed group increases the danger for them. Every ransom, whether paid or refused, targeted them personally. Every checkpoint they financed was a checkpoint that only they had to cross to go to work. [...] Financing a terrorist group is never neutral, and when a company makes a pact with terror to maintain its economic activity, those who pay the price are not those who made the decision, but those who continued to work under the threat that the company itself helped to create.”

Matthieu Bagard

“The employees could only note the defendants’ failure to grasp the seriousness of the allegations brought against them. These defendants – whom we wished to hear, whom we wished to understand – evade responsibility and shift the blame onto others, their co-defendants or, more disturbingly still, onto the victims themselves [...]

Certain things now appear clearly. First, the existence of an organized system of payments made to armed groups and subsequently to terrorist groups to ensure the continued industrial operation of the plant [...] What is also clear is that Syrian employees were exposed to the consequences of this system, which made it possible to maintain the operation of the plant at all costs [...] Syrian employees were exposed to serious risks that it was illusory to believe could be eliminated through payments – payments that, in fact, only increased their exposure [...] What remains unclear to me is the red line that Lafarge’s top executives set for themselves regarding the operation of this plant. After how much time of financing terrorist groups and maintaining operations under extreme security conditions, does one finally decide to stop, when almost all French companies had left Syria as early as 2011? [...] In reality, there was no decision to close the plant, even though many individuals were in a position to shut down this cement factory [...]

This difficulty in understanding where the red lines lie raises, in my view, the question of the risk of recurrence. How can one be convinced, in light of what has been said before this court,

that the same individuals placed in the same circumstances, within this company or another, would not make the same decisions?”

Lawyers representing Sherpa and ECCHR

Julie Février

“Operating abroad while circumventing French rules and exploiting fragile situations to generate ever greater profits is often done at any cost, because the ‘crude’ reality of this case is simply that – and nothing else. Profit, profit, always profit. Lafarge is not the only multinational employing predatory practices and, regrettably, does not stand as an exception. [...] Choosing to expand abroad, in contexts of deep social inequality, war, or authoritarian states, is not a neutral decision. It is a choice driven by the desire to see figures rise ever higher; it is a risky choice, often made at the expense of employee safety. [...]

Moreover, the deliberate choice of words by the defense distorts the reality of the case: ‘personal security’, ‘evacuation’, ‘extortion’, ‘neutrality’ [...] When one finances armed factions, one directly finances the conflict; one binds oneself to these groups. Money binds; money is not neutral. It carries immense symbolic and practical weight. There is no neutrality. Financing speaks; it is not merely a line, a figure in a spreadsheet. [...] For a cement producer, establishing operations in high-risk areas is anything but neutral, because reconstruction represents a major economic stake. It is as simple as that: when cities are razed, they must be rebuilt [...]

This financing of terrorism is not the work of a single ‘bad apple’, as the corporate entity would have us believe. In this case, there is not just one bad apple, but at least eight – and the frequency is too great for this to be a mere coincidence. It is an entire system that is malfunctioning, organizing a sense of impunity, and creating fertile ground for the commission of these offenses.

Responsibilities are diluted across multiple levels of the hierarchy, where each person believes they are acting with impunity, in a so-called ‘risk-free’ manner [...]. This reality materialized in an almost caricatural way during these hearings. It is always either the fault of the one above or the one beneath. The defendants’ explanations, at times confused, have disconcerted us over recent weeks. [...] It would have been more honorable for them to ask to address the court to apologize, to tell us that for ten years they have struggled to sleep, to look at themselves in the mirror, to eat, to watch their children grow. But even if all of that had been feigned, I would still prefer it to denial.

We are confronted with immense denial – inevitable, organized denial – no doubt stemming from a world that is itself malfunctioning. An exemplary conviction of a multinational

corporation would have a deterrent effect on all others. This trial is being closely followed internationally; it matters, and it must help dismantle this machinery of denial to rebalance the asymmetry between the powerful and the anonymous victims who place their trust in justice.”

Grégoire Rialan

“Like many others, I came into this trial with questions – not only as a lawyer, but also as a citizen. How could these highly educated individuals, with admirable career paths and positions of responsibility, people with whom one has no difficulty identifying – men who could be fathers, uncles, ordinary and loving family men – have made decisions that strike us as so baffling and so heavy with consequences, including the attacks of 13 November 2015? How could they have shown such a profound lack of discernment?

As victims of the November 13 attacks have said: one can explain – but to do so, intelligible explanations are required. And we did not obtain those explanations. That lack of discernment at the time resurfaced during the hearings. They clung to defensive narratives that did nothing but collapse. They tried to pass off falsehoods as truths, refusing to call a cat ‘a cat’”.

Read our previous weekly report (28 November-5 December 2025 – Hearings of former Syrian employees) here :

https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/Fallbeschreibungen/Weekly_reports_4_-_Lafarge_trial.pdf