

Weekly Report – Lafarge Trial, Paris Criminal Court *Prosecution’s closing submissions (16 December 2025)*

After four weeks of hearings, the National Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor’s Office (*Parquet National Antiterroriste – PNAT*) delivered its closing submissions on 16 December 2025. Over the course of six and a half hours, a meticulous closing argument against Lafarge SA and eight former top executives, security managers and local intermediaries was laid out.

The prosecutors, Aurélie Valente and Olga Martin-Belliard, made their position unmistakably clear: this case is “*the story of the total failure of individuals who could have chosen to leave*” and “*the story of the distortion of a flagship of French industry that ended up financing terrorist organisations for a purely mercantile objective*”. Instead, it was “*business at all costs*”. “*No, there is no doubt, they knew they were talking to, negotiating with, and doing business with terrorist organizations.*”

The systematic financing of terrorist organizations

The prosecutors recalled that the offence of terrorism financing does not require funds to be earmarked for a specific attack, nor does it presuppose ideological adherence to the terrorist organizations. What matters is that the funds, transferred directly or indirectly, contributed to maintaining the operational capacity of the three armed groups in this case: Ahrar Al-Sham, the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS. A total of €4,694,696 was paid by Lafarge to these groups, a record sum described as “*unprecedented and dizzying.*” To illustrate the magnitude of this amount, the prosecution recalled that it could have financed 4,000 assault rifles or the salaries of more than 3,000 fighters for an entire year.

The PNAT firmly rejected the defence’s argument that these payments were the result of extortion or racketeering. Ironically, the prosecution questioned Lafarge being portrayed as a victim of racketeering “*who negotiates with their executioners*” or “*puts pressure on them.*” Emails, internal documents and financial arrangements examined during the trial demonstrated negotiated agreements to give Lafarge an advantage over Turkish cement competitors, lists of beneficiaries, donations, and systematic payments for over a year and a half – far removed from emergency responses to coercion.

The prosecutors also depicted a “*microcosm of business leaders intoxicated by economic stakes and seduced by the siren calls of fanaticism,*” highlighting how commercial considerations progressively eclipsed legal and ethical boundaries.

Full awareness of widespread human rights violations

The closing submissions placed the defendants' conduct within the broader historical context of ISIS's rise in Syria. By 2013, the crimes and "*terrorist modus operandi*" of ISIS and other jihadist groups were widely documented and could not have been ignored. Their crimes – executions, kidnappings, enslavement, and extreme violence against civilians – were extensively reported by international media and by the groups themselves through propaganda videos. Against this backdrop, the prosecution denounced what it described as "*commercial cynicism*": the decision to continue operating a cement plant surrounded by armed groups, treating terrorist organizations as ordinary business partners, and prioritizing profit over human lives.

Absence of recognition and accountability

Olga Martin-Belliard deplored what she described as an "*impossible step to take: that of acknowledgment.*" None of the senior executives acknowledged having committed wrongdoing, expressed remorse or regret, or made any apology. Instead, they consistently invoked ignorance, uncertainty, delegation, or cultural relativism.

It was stressed that the defendants were not marginal actors but highly educated senior executives, occupying strategic positions within a multinational corporation and were therefore to be considered fully capable of understanding the consequences of their decisions at the time.

Severe sentences sought

"*Whatever their position in the operational chain, each one contributed to making the alleged offences possible,*" concluded the prosecutors as they requested all defendants to be found guilty. Prison terms of up to eight years were requested for individual defendants, along with substantial fines, professional bans, and confiscations:

- As a corporate entity, **Lafarge SA**: a €1.125 million criminal fine for terrorism financing and embargo violations, the confiscation of €30 million in assets, and a joint customs fine of €4.75 million together with four individual defendants for violations of international financial sanctions.
- **Bruno Lafont (former CEO of Lafarge SA)**, portrayed as standing at the top of the decision-making pyramid: six years' imprisonment, a €225,000 fine, the confiscation of assets, and a ten-year ban on managing or directing a commercial or industrial company
- **Bruno Pescheux (former LCS director) and Christian Herrault (former deputy CEO in charge of Syrian operations)**, described, together with Firas Tlass, as forming

“triumvirate at the origin of the payments to terrorist groups”: custodial sentences of five years, €225,000 fines, confiscations of assets, and professional bans.

- **Frédéric Jolibois (former LCS director)** described as *“the only one to raise concerns about this ecosystem and to timidly measure the plant’s actions against the legal framework”*: three years’ imprisonment, including a probationary suspended sentence, with electronic monitoring.
- Prison sentences ranging from 18 months to three years were sought against **other defendants**, including security managers and intermediaries, reflecting their respective roles in establishing and implementing the system of payments.
- **Firas Tlass**, the Syrian intermediary described as omnipresent in the financial arrangements, but absent from the trial and still under an international arrest warrant: eight years’ imprisonment and a €225,000 fine.

Conclusion

The prosecutors emphasized the *“extraordinary”* and *“meticulous”* work of Sherpa and ECCHR, noting its major impact on the justice system’s handling of the case, and highlighted the *“essential”* role of former employees' testimonies.

These submissions articulate a clear message: financing terrorism cannot be reduced to a compliance failure or an unfortunate by-product of doing business in a conflict zone. It is a crime that carries profound legal, moral, and political responsibility.

The prosecution concluded by quoting Hannah Arendt: *“human beings must never stop thinking – this is the only barrier against barbarism.”*

The final verdict is expected to be delivered on 13 April 2026.

Read our previous weekly report (9-12 December 2025) here:

https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/Fallbeschreibungen/Weekly_report_5_-_Lafarge_trial.pdf