



PRESS RELEASE

Package holiday industry revealed to be sustaining Israel's illicit settlements economy

As the International Criminal Court opens its investigations into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories, European and North American tour operators continue to include the illegal settlements in their itineraries and keep misrepresenting occupied territory as "Israel" and contribute to structural violations of Palestinian and Syrian rights.

For immediate release on 4 March 2021

European and North American tour operators regularly visit Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) and misleadingly market them as being in Israel, according to a report released today by the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO). It profiles nine industry leaders in the package tourism sector who contribute to and benefit from the maintenance of Israel's illicit settlements economy in the occupied Palestinian territory. The report also sheds light on similar practices in the occupied Syrian Golan.

A majority of the companies profiled in the report take their customers to at least two settlement sites in the OPT. Tour operators such as Audley (UK), Globus (US), Promoséjours (FR), and Viajes Catai (ES) include a variety of settlement sites in their itinerary, such as Qumran National Park, Herodium National Park, the City of David and The Inn of the Good Samaritan. Insight Vacations (Virgin Islands), Kensington Tours (US) and TUI Group (Germany/Netherlands) also offer visits to sites located in the occupied Syrian Golan. All investigated companies misrepresent part of their itinerary, for example by presenting East Jerusalem and Bethlehem (both OPT) or the Golan (Syria) as part of Israel.

“Tour companies risk being sued for leading consumers to believe they just visit Israel. Instead tourists are taken to spend money in illegal settlements, sites which likely amount to war crimes. While international tourists move freely, Palestinians in the OPT are confined to enclaves, with restricted access to their land, natural resources, and basic services such as healthcare and education,” GLAN’s Director Gearóid Ó Cuinn said.

Lydia de Leeuw, researcher with SOMO: “Illegal settlements are not holiday destinations. Tourism to sites in settlements contributes to the suffering of Palestinians and Syrians. Tourists should be aware of this. Tour operators must stop offering itineraries that include trips to settlements and end misleading marketing practices.”

Israel's illicit settlements economy is founded on acts that amount to serious violations of international humanitarian law and likely war crimes under international criminal law. Just on March 3rd, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court opened a formal investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories, which will likely include a focus on the population transfer underlying the establishment and expansion of settlements. The settlements have caused widespread dispossession and displacement, and are source of systemic and ongoing human rights



violations suffered by Palestinian communities. The maintenance and expansion of settlements is a flagrant form of denial of the Palestinian people's internationally-recognised right to self-determination, as it entrenches Israel's sovereignty claims in the OPT. Israel's tourism industry throughout the OPT critically contributes to the integration of the economy of the settlements with Israel's domestic economy, with severe cost to the Palestinian economy.

The report shows that the tour companies are vulnerable to a range of reputational risks and litigation due to potential liability under domestic and international law. For example, engaging in business transactions with Israeli settlements could result in a travel company's listing in the [UN database on business activities in Israeli settlements](#). This would not only expose them to scrutiny by their (potential) customers but would also alert the relevant authorities in their country of domicile to their contribution to violations of international criminal law.

The report calls on these tour operators to remove settlement sites from their itineraries, and to halt deceptive marketing practices. Finally, the report urges the home states of tour operators to prohibit business dealings that benefit from Israel's illicit settlement economy, and to prevent the false advertisement of illegal settlements sites.

The vast majority of Israel's population will soon be vaccinated against COVID-19, which will likely permit renewed incoming tourism. With that prospect in mind, this report provides concrete recommendations to tour operators, home states and industry bodies, on actions they should take to bring the sector's activities in line with international law.

Notes to editor

Link to report

GLAN

The Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) is a non-profit organisation that pursues innovative legal actions across borders to challenge powerful actors involved in human rights violations and systemic injustice by working with affected communities. GLAN has offices in the UK (London) and Ireland (Galway). @glan_law | www.glanlaw.org.

SOMO

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For media enquiries, please contact:

Gearoid O Cuinn (GLAN) gocuinn@glanlaw.org +44 (0)7521 203427

Camiel Donicie (SOMO) c.donicie@somo.nl +31 (0)20 639 12 91