



# Airbnb unfairly sides with Palestinians in West Bank

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WASHINGTON - "We are most certainly not the experts when it comes to the historical disputes in this region," Airbnb stated in announcing that it would no longer list rentals by Israeli citizens in the West Bank. Airbnb's modesty is commendable, but its ignorance is insidious.

Its policy for the West Bank subjects Israel to a singular global standard and reflects an all-too-common narrative about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By empowering one-sided Israel-haters, it also makes peace less likely, not more.

The West Bank is obviously disputed territory, but Airbnb sees the dispute only through Palestinian eyes.

After all, it isn't leaving the West Bank. If you want a place to rent there, you can use Airbnb to find one that's owned by a Christian or a Muslim. You just can't find any of the 200 or so owned by an Israeli Jew.

Airbnb concluded that "Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank" are "at the core of the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians."

So, Airbnb believes, what's not "at the core of the dispute" is the rejection of Israel's right to exist that's broadly shared among Palestinians and their leaders; or the incitement to violence against Jews on Palestinian TV and social media; or textbooks that teach Palestinian school children that a future Palestine should encompass all of what's now Israel; or Palestinian claims that Jews have no historical ties to key religious sites in Jerusalem.

Interesting. So, too, is Airbnb's apparent ignorance that Palestinians have rejected numerous offers of a state, including Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's offer of 2008 that would have given the Palestinians about 97 percent of the West Bank and divided Jerusalem between the two sides.

Airbnb isn't offended by territorial disputes per se. It operates in such disputed lands as the Western Sahara, Northern Cyprus, Kashmir, and Tibet.

Nor is it concerned about the issue that lies behind such disputes, which is the human rights of those involved. That's true for two reasons:

First, while Israel occupies the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority runs it. The successor to Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization, the PA is headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, who was elected to a four-year term in 2005 and has prevented elections to his office ever since.

Though the PA routinely abuses the human rights of Palestinians, Airbnb has nothing to say. Nor - while blaming the conflict on Israeli settlement policy - does it seem to care that, under Palestinian law, a Palestinian can face the death penalty for selling real estate to a Jew or that two Palestinians were sentenced last month to 15 years of hard labor for doing so.

Second, Airbnb has business in some of the world's worst human rights-abusing countries.

In its 2018 "Freedom in the World" report, Freedom House lists 88 countries as "free" - that is based on their political rights and civil liberties. Fifty-eight nations are considered "partly free" and 49 are "not free." Airbnb conducts business in more than 190 countries so, by definition, it offers rentals in some of the world's most abusive places.

Want to work for Airbnb? Check out its office in Beijing, the capital of China, where Xi Jinping is brutally "re-educating" Uighur Muslims in concentration camps. Want a rental in one of Airbnb's busier cities? Try Istanbul, showcase city of Turkey, where Recep Erdogan jails opponents and journalists under an increasingly autocratic rule.

What's Airbnb's real motive?

Well, the company announced its policy a day before Human Rights Watch was to report on its West Bank listings. It also was reportedly on a blacklist of companies operating in Israeli settlements that the U.N. Human Rights Council plans to issue.

So, to protect its brand, Airbnb is imposing a singular and wholly baseless standard on Israeli settlements in the West Bank. How inspiring!

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