

Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili
UN World Tourism Organization

16 October 2018

Dear Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili,

I write to you as the General Director of Al-Haq, a Palestinian human rights organization in the occupied Palestinian territory. It has come to our attention that the UN World Tourism Organization was represented at the "International Tourism Security Summit" in Jerusalem from 7-9 October 2018, which was organized by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, amongst other Israeli government authorities. Dirk Glaesser, the Director of the Sustainable Development Program at the UNWTO, was a featured speaker.¹

I write to you to express my deep disappointment and alarm that the UNWTO would participate in an event in Jerusalem, which not only seeks to normalize Israel's unlawful annexation of the city, but also seeks to further Israel's "security" narrative that furthers its agenda to oppress the protected Palestinian population.


As a United Nations organization, the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) should respect international law, and operate in line UN Security Council (UNSC) and General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions. Since 1948, the UN has not recognized Israeli sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem.² Most recently, in December 2017, the UNGA overwhelmingly passed a resolution reaffirming that "any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council."³

The UN has also noted how Israel's tourism sector uses confiscated Palestinian land; "*The Government of Israel has continued the practice of declaring and developing archaeological sites and parks as a means to expand control over land in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.*"⁴

¹ http://www.tourismsafety.org/Speaker.aspx?udt_7987_param_detail=10289

² See for example: Resolution 194 (III), 11 December 1948, to UNSCR 2334, 23 December 2016.

³ UNGA, A/RES/ES-10/19, 21 December 2018

⁴ Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the Occupied Syrian Golan, Report of the Secretary-General, 20 January 2016, A/HRC/31/43, para. 16. 

Given these UN positions, it is perplexing that Mr. Glaesser was reported to have stated at the conference "Compared to other products, which can assess when there will be a crisis, you have to trust or believe those [who are] presenting to you the tourism product."⁵ For over 70 years, Israel has obscured and recreated the history of the city, via changes in place-names to control over land; the "tourism product" presented by Israel can in no way be "trusted or believed."

The UNWTO should publicly acknowledge that it made a mistake through its participation in the conference, and give assurances that it will not participate in similar events in Jerusalem or other areas of the occupied Palestinian territory that are sponsored by the Israeli government.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Shawan Jabarin



⁵ Jerusalem- The Global Capital of Tourism Security, The Jerusalem Post, 12 October 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Tourism-jerusalem-the-global-capital-of-tourism-security-569220>