

Airbnb announcement that it would drop West Bank properties sparks charge of anti-Semitism

## **The company gives Crimea as another disputed territory where it has removed listings. Critics pointed to other areas under occupation—such as northern Cyprus—where it has not.**

by [Michele Chabin](#)

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Airbnb, a Web-based lodging business, pulled all 200 of its listings from Israeli settlements in the West Bank, generating allegations of anti-Semitism.

The company said in a statement in late November that it was using a case-by-case approach to decide whether to connect hosts and guests for “listings in occupied territories” in the 191 countries where it operates. Its decision-making framework, which included consulting with experts and stakeholders, led Airbnb to remove listings it sees as being “at the core of the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians.” The company still does business with more than 20,000 hosts in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and elsewhere in Israel, it stated.

Activists in the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement have long urged Airbnb and other companies to stop doing business in Israel until it relinquishes the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, which it captured during the war in 1967.

Eugene Kontorovich, a professor of law at the Scalia Law School at George Mason University, said focusing on Jewish territory smacks of anti-Semitism and reinforces the myth that Palestinians but not Jews are indigenous to the region.

“In northern Cyprus, where all the Greek Christians were thrown out by Turkey in the 1970s and which Turkey continues to occupy, Airbnb includes tons of listings,”

Kontorovich said.

Airbnb continues to list properties in mostly Palestinian East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, even though the international community also considers them occupied territories. The company's statement gives Crimea as an example of another disputed territory where Airbnb has removed listings because of international sanctions.

Josh Hasten, spokesman for the Gush Etzion Regional Council, a settlement bloc, said the boycott "is targeting a certain group of people based on their religion and their geographical location, which has been the heartland of the Jewish people for 2,000 years."

Palestinians and their supporters insist that the ban has nothing to do with anti-Semitism and everything to do with justice. Palestinians have limited self-rule in the West Bank, but Israel continues to control parts of the territory and severely limits who can enter and leave via military checkpoints.

"One can disagree on the tactic of boycotting of settlements," wrote Frima Bubis in [+972 Magazine, an independent publication in Israel/Palestine](#). "But calling Airbnb's decision anti-Semitic is a complete dilution of our political discourse, and conflates Israel with the occupation."

Bubis is the Jewish diaspora coordinator for [Breaking the Silence, an organization of Israeli military veterans](#).

"Furthermore, there are many Israeli and non-Israeli Jews who not only support the company's decision, they work on a daily basis with their non-Jewish partners to hold up a mirror to Israeli society in order to end the occupation," Bubis wrote.

In Bethlehem, Elias Deis, a Palestinian who manages the tourism program of a Palestinian Christian activist organization, said he supports Airbnb's decision and the BDS campaign "because only international pressure on Israel will end the occupation and give Palestinians their full rights."

Jewish settlements, he said, "are the main obstacle to peace. Those who support settlements are leading us to a dead end, where Palestinians and Israelis won't be able to find a peaceful solution."

For homeowners whose businesses are tied to their Holy Land locations, the Airbnb boycott brings uncertainty. Four months ago, Lewis Weinger and his family decided to offer their home in the West Bank settlement of Tekoa on Airbnb. The property, called Villa Herodion, overlooks the Judean hills and Herodion, the winter palace built by King Herod about 2,000 years ago.

As soon as the couple listed the property on Airbnb, prospective renters began to make inquiries.

Weinger has not yet decided whether to join a lawsuit filed against Airbnb by the Jewish owner of another delisted property.

“Airbnb may reverse its decision,” Weinger said. “But who knows?” —Religion News Service; *Christian Century* staff

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