

Israel: “There Is No Palestine”, It Cannot be Allowed to Join the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

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Many think tourism is something Israel and Palestine are agreeing and tourism is a peace industry – they may be wrong.

Besides the confirmation hearing for the next UNWTO Secretary General, another important decision is the application by the Palestinian Authority’s Ministry of Tourism for a full membership as a country into the United Nations World Tourism Organization. The application for Palestine was submitted last year and the full General Assembly has to agree with a two third majority to accept Palestine as a new country to join the organization. The full General Assembly is getting together in Chengdu, China next week. Palestine became a full member of UNESCO in 2011.

Tourism is an important revenue channel for Palestine and also Israel. However, Israel is indirectly in control of Palestine tourism since all international borders are controlled by the Jewish State. The UNWTO “human right for tourists to travel” does not always apply when it comes to visiting Palestine, and having to deal with Israel’s rules.

From time to time, Israel puts more restrictions on tourism to Palestine, including disallowing western visitors to re-enter Israel when staying in a hotel in Palestine.

However, cooperation between Palestine and Israel is an important and successful activity, and organizations including the International Institute for Peace Through Tourism and its founder Louis D’Amore had worked tirelessly for decades to make both Israel and Palestine understand the importance of tourism and peace. Louis d’Amore will be attending the UNWTO General Assembly in Chengdu next week.

The Israel Foreign Ministry’s spokesman said that Israel’s position is that the “State Of Palestine” does not exist, and therefore it cannot be accepted as a state in the UN or in any of its affiliated organizations.

Israel, of course, knows money always talks, and diplomatic pressure has been put on Taleb Rifai, the current Jordanian Secretary General to disallow Palestine’s move. Money talks and Israel’s foreign ministry threatened: Granting state membership to the Palestinians will lead to a greater politicization of the organization and a cut in funding. Furthermore, the Jewish State continues its pressure on UNWTO member states saying:

"We are not expecting any negative impact on Israel or its continued activity in the organization – the expected damage will be to the organization itself."

"Israel has taken all diplomatic measures to block the request," an Israel Foreign Ministry spokesman told the Jerusalem Post.

The United States of America is not a member of UNWTO, but Israel has also involved the Americans, who have warned the Palestinians that their joining the organization could have consequences in their relations with the US.

The application for Palestine is expected to be confirmed, especially since countries who could be counted on to support Israel and vote against the move – such as the US, Canada, the U.K. and Australia – are not members of the UNWTO.

Having Palestine as a full voting member of this global community could be an important step forward to secure peace and expand on tourism making the occupied territory seen less occupied and more independent.

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