

UN Publishes List of Companies Profiting from Israel's Illegal Settlements in Palestine

By [Brett Wilkins](#)

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After years of unexplained delays, the United Nations this week released a list of over 100 companies with ties to illegal Israeli settler colonies in the occupied West Bank of Palestine.

In a [statement](#) released on Wednesday, the UN Human Rights Office [identified 112 businesses](#) profiting from the Jews-only settlements. Of those, 94 are based in Israel, while 18 are headquartered in countries including the United States, United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Thailand. The UN report is a response to a 2016 United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) resolution calling for a “database for all businesses engaged in specific activities related to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

US Companies Listed

Most of the US companies listed in the report are travel-related websites, including Airbnb, Expedia, TripAdvisor and Booking Holdings. Last April, Airbnb sparked global outrage after it [reversed](#) an earlier decision to delist some 200 properties rented by Israeli colonists in the illegally-occupied West Bank. The San Francisco-based company said it would donate any proceeds from such bookings to international humanitarian aid groups. The other travel booking sites named in the UN report also [offer reservations](#) at properties in settlements.

Data communications and telecommunications equipment provider Motorola Solutions and multinational branded consumer foods giant General Mills are also listed.

In 2005, Motorola Solutions won a contract from the Israeli Ministry of Defense to provide “virtual fences” for Israeli settlements. The [MotoEagle Surveillance](#) system consists of radar and cameras that detect movement outside the settlements and is installed in 25 of the unlawful colonies. The system is also used in the West Bank separation barrier, called the “apartheid wall” by many critics. Additionally, Motorola has developed the Mountain Rose smartphone communication system for Israeli occupation forces in the West Bank. Some \$50 million for the smartphone system has been funded by American taxpayers via US military aid to Israel.

Minneapolis-based General Mills is listed due to a factory in an Israeli settlement industrial zone where Pillsbury bakery products are made. A company spokeswoman [told](#) NPR that it employs both Palestinians and Israelis at the factory, and that it operates in “compliance with labor and human rights laws.” However, that cannot be possible because the both the settlements and occupation are illegal under international law.

Occupation Is a Crime

Both [Article 49](#) of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the International Criminal Court (ICC) Rome Statute prohibit such activity. According to [Article 8\(2\)](#) of the Rome Statute, “the transfer, directly or indirectly, by an occupying power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory” are unlawful. According to the Israeli human rights group B’Tselem, [more than 620,000 Jews](#) currently reside in around 140 settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. While Israel grants every Jew in the world the right to settle in Israel, it has – against [UN resolutions](#) and international law – refused to allow the return any of the [5 million](#) Palestinian refugees resulting from the [ethnic cleansing](#) of 750,000 Arabs from their homes during the creation of Israel in 1948-49.

The international community has long condemned Israel for both the occupation and settlements. The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Israeli Settlements [found](#) “a multitude of the human rights of the Palestinians are violated in various forms and ways due to the existence of the settlements” and that “Israel is committing serious breaches of its obligations under the right to self-determination and under humanitarian law.” Last December, the International Criminal Court (ICC) [found sufficient evidence](#) to investigate possible Israeli war crimes in the occupied territories and Gaza, as well as crimes committed by Palestinian resistance groups including Gaza-based Hamas. Even the United States, Israel’s main benefactor and defender, recognized the illegality of the settlements from 1978 until the Donald Trump administration [unilaterally determined](#) last November that they do not violate international law.

Settlements = Apartheid

Prominent international critics have called Israel’s Jews-only settlements, as well as segregated roads and other infrastructure, a form of apartheid. Nobel Peace laureate Desmond Tutu, the South African religious and civil rights icon who helped lead his country’s fight against the apartheid regime imposed by its former white supremacist government, has [repeatedly called](#) Israel an “apartheid state” and has voiced strong backing for the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions ([BDS](#)) [movement](#), support for which has been [outlawed](#) in many places in the United States [and beyond](#). Former US president Jimmy Carter, who brokered the historic 1978 peace accord between Israel and Egypt, [accused](#) Israel of “worse... apartheid than we witnessed even in South Africa.”

Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki [hailed](#) the UN report as a “victory for international law.” The global NGO Human Rights Watch [said](#) that the report “should put all companies on notice: to do business with illegal settlements is to aid in the commission of war crimes.” Meanwhile, Israel slammed the database as “shameful.” Yesha Council, the main body representing Jewish settlers, said the list has “clear anti-Semitic features,” a common slur employed by Israel supporters against those, including Jews, who criticize Israeli policies and actions. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was [recently indicted](#) on corruption, fraud and breach of trust charges, [vowed](#) to annex more settlements “with the agreement of the Americans.” Netanyahu added that such a move would “not depend on the agreement of the Palestinians.”

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also blasted the database, asserting that “its publication only confirms the unrelenting anti-Israel bias” at the UN. “Attempts to isolate Israel run

counter to all of our efforts to build conditions conducive to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that lead to a comprehensive and enduring peace,” Pompeo added.

However, the recently-announced Middle East “peace plan” drafted by Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner – largely a [plagiarized Israeli plan](#) from 40 years ago – has been roundly rejected by Palestinian leadership, which earlier this month cut ties with Israel and the US over the proposal. [Under the plan](#), Israel would gain control over large areas of the West Bank, Jerusalem would fall completely under Israeli control and Jewish colonists would remain in their illegal settlements. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa [compared](#) the proposal to the “history that we went through” during the apartheid era.

An Incomplete List

The authors of the UN list acknowledge that it is not comprehensive. The “database does not cover all business activity related to settlements, and does not extend to wider business activity in the occupied Palestinian territory that may raise human rights concerns,” the report states. For example, France-based insurance multination AXA is [heavily invested](#) in Israeli banks that fund settlements, as well as Israeli arms manufacturers whose weapons are used to kill and oppress Palestinians. [Sabra](#), a hummus and dip maker partially owned by PepsiCo, technology giant [Hewlett Packard](#) and the home beverage carbonation company [SodaStream](#) – also owned by PepsiCo – are among the many other companies identified by BDS as complicit in Israeli crimes in Palestine. The BDS National Committee [also said](#) that Caterpillar, G4S, Hyundai Heavy Industries and Volvo belong on the list.

“It is high time for all public institutions, city councils, churches, trade unions, cultural organizations, universities, investment funds, and others to stop contracting, procuring from or investing in any of the companies on the UN list of shame, to avoid complicity in Israel’s settlement enterprise,” BDS National Committee said in a statement. “The BDS movement for Palestinian rights will continue our peaceful struggle, supported by people of conscience worldwide, for freedom, justice, equality and for ending all complicity in Israel’s decades-old regime of military occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid.”

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Brett Wilkins is editor-at-large for US news at Digital Journal. Based in San Francisco, his work covers issues of social justice, human rights and war and peace.

Featured image: Open wound of Ivan Rivera, a Spanish activist (Photo: ISM)

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