

Booking.com
Head office
Amsterdam

22 November 2016

Re: Booking.com misrepresenting the Occupied Syrian Golan / Golan Heights as part of Israel

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am the director of Al-Marsad – Arab Human Rights Centre in the Golan Heights. Al-Marsad is a non-profit human rights organisation that monitors and documents violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by Israel in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

I am writing to express my serious concern that Booking.com is misrepresenting the Occupied Syrian Golan as part of Israel on its website. This would be a view contrary to that of the international community and the position according to international law.

As I am sure that you are aware, Israel militarily occupied the Syrian Golan (also known as the Golan Heights) during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War (during the same period it occupied the Palestinian Territories). Following the occupation, approximately 130,000 native Syrian inhabitants were forcibly transferred or displaced from their homes and forbidden from returning. Subsequently, the Israeli military began a widespread campaign to demolish their homes, destroying one city and 340 villages and farms. These were replaced by Israeli settlements, often using the same stones from the destroyed villages and farms. Today, there are at least 23,000 Israeli settlers in the Occupied Syrian Golan, living in 34 illegal settlements, whilst the remaining native Syrian population continues to suffer from violations of their basic human rights.

Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan has been roundly condemned by the international community. This includes its purported annexation of the Occupied Syrian Golan in 1981 and its attempts to change the landscape of the Occupied Syrian Golan through illegal settlement construction and natural resource exploitation (at the expense of the native Syrian inhabitants). The international community has repeatedly demanded that Israel cease its occupation and return to its pre-1967 borders.¹

¹ See (including but not limited to): UN Security Council resolutions 446 (22 March 1979), 452 (20 July 1979), 465 (1 March 1980), 497 (17 December 1981). See also recent statements from the [United Nations](#), [United States](#) and the [European Union](#) rejecting Israel's latest rhetoric regarding sovereignty over the Occupied Syrian Golan.

Given the above, I am sure that you can understand my concern to learn that Booking.com is misrepresenting the Occupied Syrian Golan as part of Israel on its website, some examples of which I cite below:

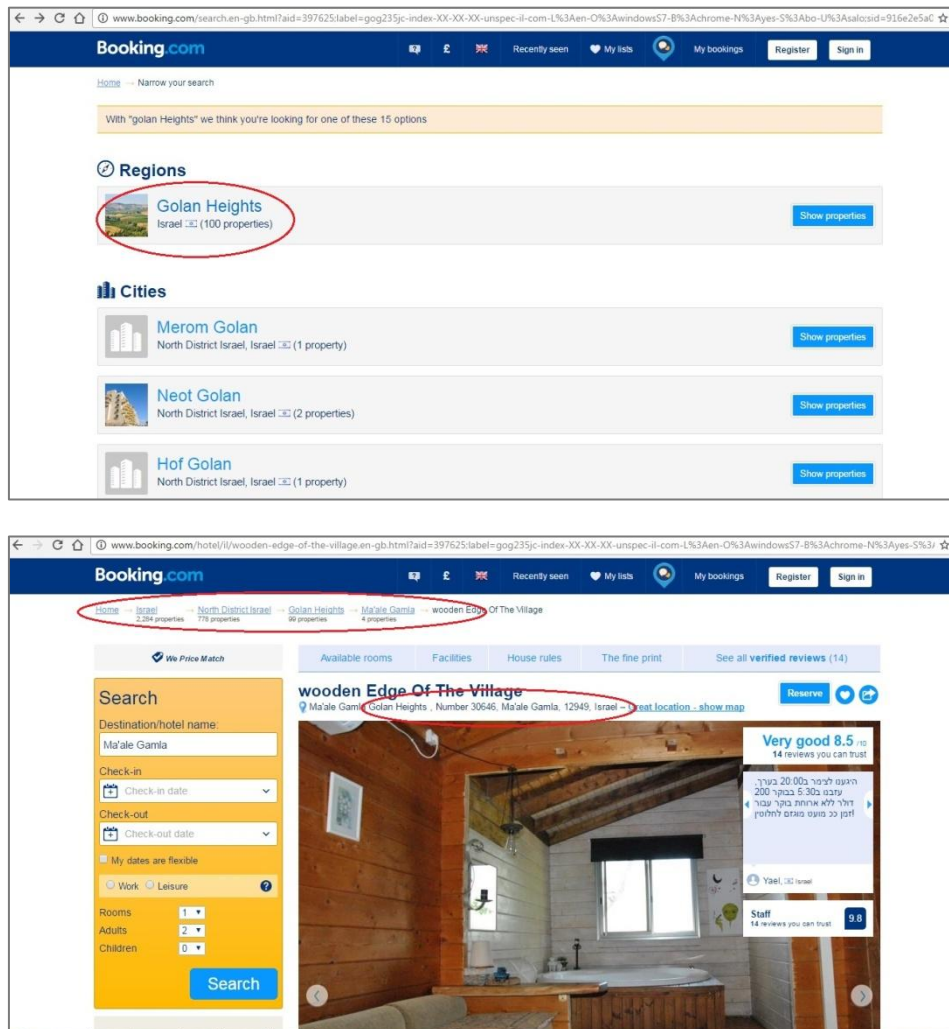


Fig. 1: Top: Search results for Golan Heights on Booking.com. The Golan Heights is advertised as being part of Israel. Fig. 2: Bottom: Example property on Booking.com. The property is advertised as being in Israel, when it is in fact in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

Furthermore, many of the properties advertised in the Occupied Syrian Golan are in fact in illegal Israeli settlements (indeed, this includes the example in Fig.2). However, there is no information provided on Booking.com to inform potential customers of this fact. It is the prerogative of a Booking.com customer to decide where he/she stays, however, with no information provided, it is impossible for the customer to make an informed decision on whether to stay in an illegal settlement.

Hence, I respectfully request that Booking.com amends its website to accurately reflect the status of the Occupied Syrian Golan / Golan Heights according to international law, and to provide

information to Booking.com customers in order that they are aware when the properties they view are in illegal Israeli settlements.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any information to help rectify this situation.

I thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this important matter, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



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