

AN OPINION PIECE ON **GOOGLE MAPFARE ON PALESTINE**



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**WHERE IS
PALESTINE?**

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An Opinion Piece on

Google Mapfare on Palestine

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Google and Apple’s removal of Palestine from their respective maps has created a worldwide outrage regarding the recognition of a state’s territorial integrity in accordance with international law. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter protects the right of Palestinians to be recognized on international forums and institutions. Google and Apple are international companies operating across the world. As international companies, they are bound to respect international legal obligations. Google and Apple’s act, in this case, contradict the obligations enshrined in international treaties and UN resolutions. Moreover, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights also state that Governments must provide a robust and appropriate remedy for those affected, especially in the wake of violation of human rights by companies. This recent move has further added to the sufferings of already oppressed Palestinians who are seeking justice for decades. The international community should take immediate notice of the issue and support Palestine in restoring its UN-recognized status.



The establishment of Israeli settlements in the Israeli-occupied territories of Palestine is illegal as it clearly violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states:

“The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”

The Convention also prohibits the “individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory.” Israel’s building of settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, does not respect any of these rules and exceptions. UN Security Council Resolution 446 refers to the 4th Geneva Convention as the applicable international legal instrument and calls upon Israel to desist from transferring illegal immigrants into the occupied territories or changing their demographic makeup. Nearly 126 representatives at the reconvened Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions in 2014 declared the Israeli settlements illegal.

Following President Donald Trump’s controversial “Middle East Peace Plan” or “Deal of the Century,” which proposes annexation of the existing Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan Valley, Jerusalem, and some parts of Jerusalem surroundings. Behind this move of “Peace Deal” to “annexation of Jordan Valley” and the recent disappearance of Palestine from Google and Apple maps have aggravated the situation worldwide, especially regarding the recognition and territorial integrity of states while fueling to the sufferings of already oppressed Palestinians. Google is a registered company in the United States. Therefore, it is under obligation to respect the legal obligations of the country. Google and Apple’s act, in this case, contradict the US obligations enshrined in international treaties and UN resolutions. If a company violates the law of the land, then the parent country is under the obligation to bring it in conformity with the municipal and International legal obligations. The silence of the USA over Google and Apple’s unlawful act shows the state’s consent to the move. The government of the USA should fulfill its responsibilities. This decision fulfills unlawful claims of Israel over Palestinian territories.

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Moreover, the removal of Palestine from Google Maps is also a violation of the Google Code of Conduct, which states:



“In everything we do, we are guided by internationally recognized human rights standards. We are committed to respecting the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its implementing treaties, as well as upholding the standards established in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and in the Global Network Initiative Principles.”

Removing Palestine from Google Maps breaches not only Google’s own Code of Conduct but also is a violation of Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 that prohibits all sorts of discriminatory acts. Google claims to remain neutral on geopolitical disputes and make every effort to objectively display disputed areas. It consults the United Nations, international treaties, and other government agencies, and its executives participate in conferences as part of its efforts. However, in this recent move, it has not only neglected UN consultation but has also exercised indiscriminate authority.

A Google official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, recently said that they are often directed to change maps without any reason, and these changes are implemented instantly.

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UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights also state that Governments must provide a robust and appropriate remedy for those affected, especially in the wake of violation of human rights by companies. A state has to provide access to an effective remedy, which includes taking appropriate steps to ensure that state-based domestic judicial mechanisms can effectively address business-related human rights abuses, and do not erect barriers that prevent victims from presenting their cases.

Now the US is under the aforementioned legal obligations to assist Palestine in moving their case to the US Supreme Court against Google.

Google itself states its policy for placing countries on maps as:

“The Services rely on widely recognized international standards for naming and mapping conventions. For example, for a country and territory naming, the company relies primarily on the ISO-3166 standard, which is recognized by the UN Statistics Division”.

But what does the ISO-3166 really say? According to Miranda Bogen, Privacy Policy Manager at Facebook, UN Statistics Division, which manages the Standard Country and Area Codes for Statistical Use list, reported a change in designation from ‘Occupied Palestinian Territory’ to ‘State of Palestine.’ This prompted a corresponding change on the International Standardization Organization’s (ISO) 3166–1 list, which is a widely used source for country codes used by technological giants. On May 1, 2013, Google replaced the label on its google.ps homepage from ‘Google Palestinian Territories’ to ‘Google Palestine.’

A screenshot of the Google search homepage. The word "Google" is in its multi-colored font, with "Palestinian territories" written in a smaller, grey font directly below it. Below the logo is a search bar, and under it are two buttons: "stroke of luck" and "Google search a". At the bottom, it says "Google ps offered in: English".A screenshot of the Google search homepage. The word "Google" is in its multi-colored font, with "Palestine" written in a smaller, grey font directly below it. Below the logo is a search bar, and under it are two buttons: "stroke of luck" and "Google search a". At the bottom, it says "Google ps offered in: English".

Google's stepping back from its policy violates the ISO-3166 standard. Google should thereby follow the policy of consulting the UN, ISO, and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in letter and spirit and put Palestine again on Google Maps while recognizing due respect of the sovereign status of Palestine.

Recommendations

- Google should respect the recognized status of Palestine under UN General Assembly Resolution No. 181.
- Recognize and mark illegal Israeli settlements on its maps in accordance with Article 49 of Geneva Convention (IV), and Article 55 of the Hague Regulations reflect that a territory cannot be named after its occupying power.
- Google should write designated name "Palestine" on its maps consistent with UN General Assembly Resolution No. 67/19.
- Google should follow the policy of consulting the UN, ISO, and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in letter and spirit.
- Palestine should claim damages from Google on this highly biased act.
- Concerning biased google searches, breach of privacy law, Muslim organizations, i.e., OIC and World Muslim Congress, should open investigation and inquiry against Google in accordance with the procedure followed by European Union that compelled Google to blur, remove and limit Street View Photography.

- Palestinian officials should have a meeting with officials at Google Headquarters and initiate the case in the US.
- States should take precautionary measures to prevent a person from depicting, disseminating, publishing, or distributing any wrong or false topographic information of states, including international boundaries through internet platforms or online services or in any electronic or physical form by enacting special Geospatial Regulatory Act.
- All Muslim countries need to raise this issue in the UN unitedly and forcefully.

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