

50 Palestinians ordered off Israeli bus to make room for three Jewish riders



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Tel Aviv, August 11 (RHC)-- An Israeli bus company has apologized after a bus driver ordered 50 Palestinian workers off a bus near Tel Aviv last week. The driver ordered the Palestinians off the bus after three Jewish passengers got on and refused to travel with the Palestinians.

Tnufa issued the apology after it was approached by the Haaretz daily, which had spoken with one of the Palestinian passengers, many of whom were forced to find alternative, more expensive routes back to their homes in the West Bank last Thursday.

The Palestinian passenger, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Haaretz that he and a group of other construction workers waited at Tel Aviv's Hamasger Junction for Bus 288 back to the West Bank only to see several of those buses pass them without stopping. Eventually, an empty bus stopped for them and roughly 50 Palestinian workers got on.

When it arrived in Bnei Brak, an ultra-Orthodox suburb of Tel Aviv, three Jewish passengers boarded and immediately began urging the driver to kick the Palestinians off the bus. The driver eventually agreed to pull over and made a phone call to whom the Palestinian assumed was his boss. After ending the call, the driver ordered the Palestinians off the bus, in what constituted illegal conduct.

The bus company claimed that it conducted an investigation after the Haaretz inquiry and found that one of the Jewish passengers pretended to be a Transportation Ministry employee and intimidated a recently hired driver into kicking the Palestinians off the bus. The imposter told the driver he would lose his job or be heavily fined if he didn't comply, Tnufa's CEO Mikhael Kopilovsky claimed.

"The company apologizes to the passengers for the unfortunate incident," Kopilovsky said, adding that "many of our drivers and workers at the company are Arabs."

Route 288 travels between the Tel Aviv central bus station and the Ariel settlement and is supposed to serve both Israelis and Palestinians going to and from the West Bank.

Over 100,000 Palestinians in the West Bank hold permits to cross into Israel and West Bank settlements where they work in fields such as construction and gardening, earning higher wages than they would likely receive in Palestinian Authority-controlled areas while also becoming essential parts of the Israeli economy.

In related news, Tnufa denied in a statement to Haaretz that it has separate bus lines for Jews and Arabs, which would be a violation of Israeli law.

In 2015, then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu suspended a Defense Ministry pilot plan that would have banned Palestinians with work permits from using Israeli buses to enter the West Bank. The plan was fiercely criticized by opposition politicians and others at the time, who claimed that it constituted an "apartheid" policy.

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