US DOT: KUWAIT AIRWAYS UNLAWFULLY DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ISRAELI PASSENGER

News / Airlines

The United States Department of Transportation sent a letter today to the national airline carrier of Kuwait, **Kuwait Airways**, finding that the company unlawfully **discriminated** against a **passenger** traveling on an **Israeli** passport by refusing to sell him a ticket for travel from John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) to London Heathrow Airport (LHR).

As part of its recent investigation, U.S. DOT concluded that Kuwait Airways unreasonably discriminates against Israeli citizens in its ticketing practices. The letter sent to Kuwait Airways reiterated to the carrier that by choosing to operate an air route between the United States and the United Kingdom, Kuwait Airways has taken advantage of the facilities and benefits of the United States and must comply with its laws forbidding unreasonable discrimination in foreign air transportation.

The letter was in response to a complaint filed by an Israeli citizen, Eldad Gatt, after he attempted to purchase a ticket online through Kuwait Airways in 2013 from the U.S. to the U.K. When the

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airline's online booking system precluded him from selecting Israel as his passport-issuing country, Mr. Gatt was unable to purchase a ticket and subsequently filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation alleging unlawful discrimination.

"It is our duty to ensure that the transportation system is free of discrimination. Period. I know how important protections against discrimination are, and our Department will stand firmly against it. Today, we are saying "no" to discrimination against Israeli citizens on flights between the U.S. and the U.K.," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. Any airline that wishes to operate in the U.S. should know that we will not tolerate discrimination of any kind in our skies," Secretary Foxx continued.

Kuwait Airways states that it did not sell a ticket to Mr. Gatt because of a Kuwaiti law which states, in part, that "…every natural or legal [Kuwaiti] is prohibited to enter into an agreement, personally or indirectly, with entities or persons residing in Israel, or with Israeli citizenship."

U.S. DOT concluded that this is not a proper justification for the denial of air transportation. The Department notes that there is no question that a person holding a valid Israeli passport can depart the United States and enter the United Kingdom.

Kuwait Airways has been given 15 days to outline to DOT's Aviation Enforcement Office the steps that it plans to take to come into compliance with the law.

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