

Officially, Israel No Longer Seen as 'Occupiers' of West Bank

The State Department's annual report on human rights violations around the world was published on Friday and has dropped reference to the "West Bank" in Israel as "occupied" for the first time since 1979.

Whereas previous publications of the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices had a section on "Israel and the Occupied Territories," this year's document refers instead to "Israel, Golan Heights, West Bank and Gaza." Last December, U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman asked the State Department to stop calling the West Bank "occupied."

In addition, the report contains a new note about the status of Jerusalem, in light of President Trump's decision on December 6, 2017, to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It states that "issues primarily related to Israeli residents of Jerusalem are covered in the 'Israel and the Golan Heights' section. It is the position of the United States that the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem are subject to final status negotiations between the parties."

Despite these changes, many of the contents of the report have remained somewhat similar to what has been published in previous years. The current 2017 report states that "the most significant human rights issues included Palestinian terror attacks against Israeli civilians and security forces in the West Bank and Jerusalem, which killed 13 Israelis. Israeli forces killed 68 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, four of whom nongovernmental organizations and media reported did not pose a lethal threat to Israeli Security Forces or

civilians at the time they were killed.”

“It is about time that the State Department stopped referring to land in Israel as ‘occupied territories,’” said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel, President of Christians in Defense of Israel, and Founder and President of Covenant Journey. “I applaud the Trump administration for this welcome change.

“The media often uses terms like ‘occupied territories’ and ‘refugee camps’ to delegitimize Israel. Most people hearing the words ‘refugee camp’ visualize a makeshift tent city, when in reality these places are established neighborhoods with businesses and schools. I am pleased the State Department has eliminated the derogatory and false term ‘occupied territories’ language.”

Liberty Counsel produced a 13-part original TV series aired on TBN called *Why Israel Matters*, which can be viewed here. This exclusive series is designed to demonstrate in a powerful way the crucial importance of the Jewish state of Israel to Christians, to America and to the world. Liberty Counsel and Christians in Defense of Israel also produced a full-color book called *Why Israel Matters: Past, Present and Forever*.
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