ISRAELI PASSENGERS MAKE A SCENE, REFUSE TO TAKE OFF, UNTIL ARAB-ISRAELI PASSENGERS TAKEN OFF BOARD.

News / Airlines

A number of Israelis returning from a vacation in Greece with Aegean Airlines on Monday caused a scene when two Arab-Israeli men boarded the same aircraft and drew their attention.

This did not fare well with the Israelis on board who turned to the flight attendants and said they would not allow the plane to embark with the two men on board. Despite the scene caused by the Israelis, the flight attendants went about their cabin-preparations as usual, and the captain prepared for take-off.

When the crew was ready for take-off, the Israelis refused to take a seat - violating takeoff procedures which require that all passengers remain seated for take-off - preventing the aircraft from taking off.

According to Israel Radio, which broke the story, an argument broke out between the Israeli and

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Arab passengers. The Greek crew was in utter shock and could not fully comprehend the exchanges between the sides.

The argument carried on for an hour, after which the crew realized that there was no end in sight. They approached the two Arab-Israeli men and offered them a hotel for the night and flight for the following day. They took up the offer to return to Israel Tuesday morning.

The Israelis on board continued to make a scene even after the two Arab-Israelis deplaned, demanding that the crew conduct an additional security check. The crew, fed-up with the Israelis, refused to give in to their demands, and told the passengers to take a seat, otherwise, they'd be taken off-board sans-compensation.

The Israelis gave in to the threat, agreed to take a seat, and made their way back to Israel.

A statement by Aegean said, "On the scheduled Aegean flight A3 928 from Athens to Tel Aviv on January the 3rd, an initially small group of some passengers very vocally and persistently asked for two other Israeli passengers to be checked for security issues."

"While it is indeed unfortunate that they were possibly racially profiling the customers, indeed their fellow Israelis, because safety must be first, the pilot did feel compelled to delay the flight call the police so to check again the two Israeli passengers documents and identities. This did take some time of course but the documents were indeed checked and were ok."

"Unfortunately by that time, due to the delay, a much larger group of passengers were reacting despite the assurances given by the crew about the two passengers. So with the agreement of the two Israeli passengers that were affected, for which we are very thankful, we offered them overnight stay and transport the next day, we offloaded their luggage. We also offered any other passenger of course the possibility to disembark in case they did not feel secure."

"The whole episode , which did indeed delay the flight for more than 1 hour and 30 minutes, is indeed very unfortunate and we are grateful that the two Israeli passengers affected did agree to fly the next day. We thank again the two Israeli passengers that agreed to disembark for their understanding and collaboration and we apologize for the whole episode which was indeed extremely unfortunate."

The Director of Amnesty International in Israel Yonatan Gher said the incident on the plane reflected the Israeli government's incitement against the Arab Israeli community following the Tel Aviv shooting attack last week in which two people were killed.

Nashat Milhem, the suspect in the deadly Tel Aviv attack, who is still at large, is an Israeli Arab who hails from the Galilee.

"Two days have not passed [since the Tel Aviv terror attack] and we are hearing about two Palestinian citizens of Israel on a flight bound for Israel who were taken off the plane following the demands of Jewish passengers," Gher said.

"People should not be surprised by such shameful acts when the prime minister [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] stands at the forefront of incitement and the racist narrative against an entire sector of society, during the last election and now as well," Gher said.

On election day in March, Netanyahu was criticized when he urged voters to go out and vote because "Arab voters are going en masse to the polls." Netanyahu was also criticized on the weekend when he went to the site of the terror attack in Tel Aviv and said Israel "would demand

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loyalty to the laws of the state from everyone."

06 JANUARY 2016

SOURCE: THE JERUSALEM POST
ARTICLE LINK:
https://to.50skyshades.com/news/airlines/israeli-passengers-make-a-scene-refuse-to-take-off-until-arab-israeli-passengers-taken-off-board

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