

French hotels protest 'outrageous' Airbnb-Olympics deal

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IOC President Thomas Bach (L) announced the deal at a London press conference with Airbnb co-founder Joe Gebbia Tuesday

French hotel owners assailed Airbnb on Wednesday over its new partnership with the International Olympic Committee, warning they would stop working on the planning for the Paris 2024 summer Games

to protest against what they call an unfair competitor.

French hotels have long accused home rental platform Airbnb of taking advantage of minimal oversight to undercut their business, and have been lobbying authorities for a crackdown on short-term tourist rentals.

"Airbnb doesn't play by the rules, and must be disqualified," the GNI association of independent hotels said in a statement during an industry gathering in the Atlantic coast resort town of Biarritz.

The GNI said it would file a protest with the IOC's ethics commission, as well as the organising committee for the 2024 summer Games in Paris.

"Hotels are going to suspend their participation in the organisation of the 2024 Games," said Laurent Duc, head of the main UMIH hotel trade group, which organised the Biarritz conference.

"Already the (Airbnb) platform objects to passing on the visitor's tax with clearly identified addresses and owners, as required by law," he told AFP.

'It is outrageous'

In a statement, the UMIH and the GCN alliance of hotel chains called the Olympic partnership "inappropriate".

"It is outrageous to make this company, which spurs deregulation in countries around the world, a global partner of the IOC," it said.

Paris City Hall quickly voiced its support for the hotel sector on Wednesday, calling their "cry of alarm... normal" in view of the general "destabilisation" of the hotel sector caused by the platform.

Tony Estanguet, the president of the organising committee for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games stressed that the hotel business had not been left out in the cold.

"We have already been working with the professionals (in the hotel business)," he told AFP.

"We have already reserved 40,000 rooms for our needs in 2024."

The UMIH sued Airbnb in June 2018 for "knowingly violating" rules imposed as part of a crackdown in one of the US giant's biggest markets.

Paris alone has 65,000 listings on Airbnb, and there are thousands more in the nearby suburbs that will house many of the venues for the 2024 Olympics.

'Where is the morality?'

Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo has also vowed to tighten oversight of Airbnb rentals after warning IOC President Thomas Bach about the "risks" of the partnership.

Hidalgo, who is up for re-election next May, promised to hold a vote on how home-sharing platforms should be regulated, at a time when many residents blame Airbnb for driving up rents.

"Where is the morality?" UMIH president Roland Heguy told AFP. "We worked since the beginning on this candidacy with the Paris 2024 organising committee."

Asked about the opposition from hotels, Airbnb said in a statement Wednesday that "this historic accord aims to allow host cities to welcome the Games in a more local, authentic and sustainable manner".

It noted that Airbnb had already been a national partner for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro and the 2018 Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, and that "its values are in line with those of the Olympic movement".

Its nine-year deal with the IOC, announced on Monday, puts it in the league of Coca-Cola and Visa as a "Top" partner, the highest sponsorship level.

The partnership starts with the 2020 summer Olympics in Tokyo, runs through the Beijing winter Games two years later, the 2024 Paris summer Olympics, the 2026 winter Games in Milan-Cortina, and ends with the Los Angeles summer events in 2028.

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