

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Secretary Blinken,

As the 20th anniversary of the United Nation's World Conference on Racism, otherwise known as Durban IV, approaches, we appreciate the State Department's continued stance against participation in this deeply troubling forum. For the past 20 years, these conferences have advocated agendas that have unfairly and baselessly targeted our democratic ally, Israel.

The United States will lead a coalition of some twenty nations that will boycott the conference and highlight the discriminatory and anti-Israel agenda that is a core component of these conferences. This is the right thing to do and represents a welcome message of support for Israel. It is troubling that at a time when countries of the world should be banding together to nobly fight the evils of racism, discrimination and anti-Semitism, forums such as the World Conference Against Racism are hijacked by Israel's detractors to propagate their own agenda.

Since its inception, the Durban Conference has provided a venue for intolerance and antisemitism, and has promoted a message of isolating Israel. Some twenty years ago in 2001, America exhibited great leadership in withdrawing from the original Durban Conference as it developed a draft conference report equating Zionism and racism – a move that succeeded in ensuring that the odious language was excised from the final declaration. However, at a parallel NGO Forum which served as a meeting place for civil society groups, anti-Israel activists adopted an informal resolution characterizing Israel as a racist apartheid state and accusing it of genocide.

At Durban II in 2009, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad infamously called the Holocaust an "ambiguous and dubious question" and a "pretext" for oppressing Palestinians. Every iteration of the Durban process has promoted racism, intolerance, antisemitism, and Holocaust denial while questioning Israel's fundamental right to exist.

Both Republican and Democratic U.S. administrations have consistently boycotted Durban in support of American principles and our Israeli ally. We greatly appreciate comments made earlier this year by the State Department, reiterating that "the United States stands with Israel and has always shared its concerns over the Durban process's anti-Israel sentiment, use as a forum for antisemitism, and freedom of expression issues."

We also appreciate the pledge you and other senior members of the Biden Administration have made to uphold the longstanding bipartisan tradition of advocating for Israel and opposing her

isolation at other international and multilateral fora. The Israeli people are vital allies and we stand ready to work with you on these and further efforts in their support.

Sincerely,



Rob Portman
United States Senator



Ben Cardin
United States Senator