Portman and Cardin Lead 68 Senators in Letter to Secretary Blinken to Prioritize Ending the United Nations Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry on the Israeli Palestinian Conflict

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Office of Senator Rob Portman

<https://www.portman.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/portman-and-cardin-lead-68-senators-letter-secretary-blinken-prioritize>

Today, U.S. Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Ben Cardin (D-MD), a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, led a bipartisan group of 68 senators in a letter urging the Biden administration to “prioritize reversing the U.N. Human Rights Council’s (UNHRC) discriminatory and unwarranted treatment of Israel by leading a multinational effort in the Council and in the U.N. to end the permanent Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” In May 2021, the UNHRC approved an open-ended investigation of Israel “war crimes, treatment of Palestinians, and human rights violations” which is the only country specific agenda item on the Council’s agenda. This Commission is unfair, unwarranted and singles out Israel, further fueling anti-Semitism. With the United States returning as a member of the UNHRC earlier this year, the senators urge the secretary to use our position to redirect resources from wasteful and biased investigations into Israel and focus on human rights crises around the world.

*“We appreciate your commitment to put the Council’s ‘disproportionate focus on Israel’ at the top of the Biden administration’s agenda for reforming the Council when the U.S. announced it would seek to rejoin the UNHRC …By unfairly singling out Israel, the UNHRC undermines its credibility to investigate human rights violations around the world*,” **the senators wrote.**

*“The COI is the latest endeavor by UNHRC to discredit the only Jewish state and is likely to further fuel antisemitism worldwide. Therefore, we urge you to act upon the Administration’s commitment to defend Israel from discriminatory treatment at the Human Rights Council and throughout the UN system,”***the senators continued.**

This Commission on Israel solely focuses on the actions Israel took during the conflict between Israel and the terrorist group Hamas, in Israel’s right to defend itself. The UNHRC also passed roughly an equal number of resolutions from 2006-2019 condemning Israel and the rest of the world combined. This did not include condemnation of Russia or China.

Joining Portman and Cardin in signing today’s letter include: U.S. Senators: Charles Schumer (D-NY), Jim Risch (R-ID), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), John Thune (R-SD), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Chris Coons (D-DE), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Susan Collins (R-ME), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), John Boozman (R-AR), Ben Sasse (R-NE), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Margaret Hassan (D-NH), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Gary Peters (D-MI), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Patty Murray (D-WA), Joni Enrst (R-IA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), John Cornyn (R-TX), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Tim Scott (R-SC), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Bill Hagerty (R-TN), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Mike Braun (R-IN), Mark Warner (D-VA), Rick Scott (R-FL), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Roger Marshall (R-KS), Bob Casey (D-PA), John Kennedy (R-LA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Mike Lee (R-UT), Raphael Warnock (R-GA), Steve Daines (R-MT), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Jon Tester (D-MT), Todd Young (R-IN), Roy Blunt (R-MO), Pat Toomey (R-PA), Josh Hawley (R-MO), Tommy Tuberville (R-AL), Mike Crapo (R-ID), John Hoeven (R-ND).

The full letter can be found [here](https://bit.ly/3iHnMj1) and below.

Dear Secretary Blinken,

With the return of the United States to the UN Human Rights Council, we think it is time for the American presence on the Council to be used to address major human rights problems around the world. An important step in this regard would be to redirect the wasteful use of funds and personnel on excessive devotion to disparaging Israel to allow the UN Human Rights Council to fairly promote human rights around the world.

We write to urge you to prioritize reversing the UN Human Rights Council’s (UNHRC) discriminatory and unwarranted treatment of Israel by leading a multinational effort in the Council and in the UN to end the permanent Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

In May 2021, just days after the conflict between the Gaza-based terrorist organization Hamas and Israel, the UNHRC approved an unprecedented open-ended investigation of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians, purported war crimes and human rights violations. This Commission will not only focus on the actions Israel took in Gaza as it sought to defend its citizens, it will also have a carte blanche mandate – in perpetuity – to examine any period in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict about violations not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but also within Israel’s pre-1967 borders. The mandate made no mention of the 4,300 lethal rockets fired by Hamas toward Israeli civilians in a matter of days and no mention of Israel’s right to defend itself.

This one-sided approach is consistent with UNHRC’s continuing bias against Israel and the disproportionate use of resources in an ongoing campaign to disparage, discredit and denounce Israel. Its Agenda Item VII is the only country-specific permanent item on the Council’s agenda. The COI will now operate with an annual budget of over $4 million and a permanent staff of 18, which represents considerable resources devoted to maligning and ultimately prosecuting Israel. Of the thirty-two UNHRC mandated investigative probes, nine have been against Israel. By comparison, the investigation of North Korea’s violations of the human rights of its people had half the staff and lasted for only a year. Additionally, egregious human rights violations such as the treatment of the Uyghurs in China are not addressed by the UNHRC at all.

We appreciate your commitment to put the Council’s “disproportionate focus on Israel” at the top of the Biden Administration’s agenda for reforming the Council when the U.S. announced it would seek to rejoin the UNHRC, as well as your commitment to “continue to uphold our strong commitment to Israel and its security, including by opposing actions that seek to target Israel unfairly.”  Delegitimizing and ultimately eliminating this permanent commission is an opportunity for the administration to fulfill U.S. Ambassador Patrick Kennedy’s pledge to the Council that “the U.S. stands with Israel in rejecting the unprecedented open-ended mandate of this Commission of Inquiry, which perpetuates a practice of unfairly singling out Israel in the U.N.”

By unfairly singling out Israel, the UNHRC undermines its credibility to investigate human rights violations around the world.

The COI is the latest endeavor by UNHRC to discredit the only Jewish state and is likely to further fuel antisemitism worldwide. Therefore, we urge you to act upon the Administration’s commitment to defend Israel from discriminatory treatment at the Human Rights Council and throughout the UN system. We also urge the U.S. to firmly raise its voice and concerns during the current UNHRC session, the first meeting in several years in which the United States will be a member of the council.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,