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## **Israeli Rugby Team to World Rugby Union: Take Emergency Action to Reverse South Africa Union's Discriminatory Exclusion**

### **Alerts other rugby unions that teams playing in tournament risk sanctions**

**Washington, D.C., March 15:** The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, the new legal team representing the Tel Aviv Heat, today urged the [World Rugby Union](#) to take immediate emergency action to reverse South Africa Rugby Union's last-minute exclusion of the Israeli team from the Mzansi Challenge competition.

The Brandeis Center strongly urged the World Rugby Union that since the South Africa Rugby Union's (SARU) discriminatory exclusion of the Heat violates the World Rugby Union's bylaws, they should immediately reinstate the Heat as a competitor in the upcoming international tournament, direct SARU to apologize for its discriminatory act, and impose any sanctions they deem appropriate under the rules.

The Brandeis Center also called on each of the individual rugby unions whose clubs are scheduled to participate in the tournament -- [Kenya](#), [Mexico](#), [Namibia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#) -- to stand with the Heat and oppose SARU's discriminatory conduct, and they cautioned the unions that teams which participate in competitions found to violate World Rugby Union bylaws could be subject to sanctions.

The Tel Aviv Heat was confirmed to participate in the upcoming tournament, scheduled to begin on March 24<sup>th</sup>, until SARU did a complete about-face and notified the Heat that "SA [South Africa] Rugby has withdrawn an invitation to the Tel Aviv Heat to play in the Mzansi Challenge, following representations from multiple stakeholders." The World Rugby Union is currently investigating the matter.

In its legal letter to the World Rugby Union, the Brandeis Center cites evidence that the decision to exclude the Heat was made for discriminatory reasons, because the team is based in Israel. The South African BDS Coalition -- which had called on SARU to rescind the Heat's invitation -- posted on Twitter, "BDS works!" above text referring to SARU's decision. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel thanked BDS activists "for standing up for Palestinian rights and taking swift action to compel SARU to reverse the misguided decision" to invite the Heat. South African newspaper Al-Qalam titled its coverage of the Heat's exclusion, "Victory for SA BDS Coalition and Palestine Solidarity." And the South African National Union of Metalworkers declared, "The decision was reversed because of pressure, particularly from organizations like the BDS Coalition who launched a public campaign rejecting" the Heat's invitation.

The World Rugby Union bylaws explicitly prohibit "discrimination of any kind against a country, or against a private person or groups of people including on account of age, gender, marital status, maternity status, disability, race (including color, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation or any other reason."

As noted by the Brandeis Center, member unions like SARU undertake to abide by World Rugby Union bylaws, including these rules prohibiting discrimination. Unions may be sanctioned for misconduct, including "acts or statements that are,

or conduct that is, discriminatory by reason of religion, race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, color or national or ethnic origin[.]” Similarly, member unions are bound by the World Rugby Union’s Code of Conduct, which prohibits discrimination, banning “anything which is likely to intimidate, offend, insult, humiliate or discriminate against any other Person on the ground of their religion, race, sex, sexual orientation, color, or national or ethnic origin.” The Brandeis Center notes that on the rare occasions when a team has been excluded from competition, the World Rugby Union and International Olympic Committee have made those decisions – national unions have no right to discriminate on their own initiative.

The Brandeis Center also emphasizes that international sports have repeatedly rejected discrimination against Israeli teams and athletes. For example, the World Paralympic Committee relocated its 2019 Swimming Championships out of Malaysia to the United Kingdom because Malaysia had not agreed to permit Israeli athletes to compete. Judo events scheduled to be held in Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates have been cancelled because the host countries would not allow the Israeli flag to be raised. The 2019 World Schools Chess Championship, scheduled to be held in Tunisia, was eventually held in Turkey instead after Tunisian authorities refused to grant a visa to an Israeli competitor. In addition, the Brandeis Center notes that many of the countries that World Rugby Union member unions hail from have been the subject of investigations into alleged human rights violations, including the United States and Iran. As a result, allowing national unions to unilaterally discriminate against each other or against teams from other unions on the basis of alleged violations would destabilize international rugby and undermine the inclusive values of international sports.

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