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Major Jewish Orgs – ADL, AJC, Conf of Presidents, Simon Wiesenthal Center, Brandeis Center, and Others – Urge U.S. Rugby Team to Pull Out of Tomorrow’s South Africa Tournament that Banned Israel

Cite Impression US Team and USA Rugby Support Discrimination

Washington, D.C. (March 24, 2023): In a [letter](#) organized by The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, major Jewish organizations today urged the U.S. team, the San Clemente Rhinos, to pull out of tomorrow’s Mzansi Challenge competition in South Africa. The organizations note that there is an appearance the Rhinos are benefiting from, and essentially endorsing, South Africa Rugby Union’s (SARU) anti-Semitic exclusion of Israel’s first Rugby team.

“Your obligation to lead on this issue is particularly pressing because there is an unacceptable appearance that the San Clemente Rhinos are benefiting from discrimination against the Heat,” wrote the organizations. “While another team has also quit the competition, the appearance is that an American team is benefiting from discrimination by filling a void created in large measure by the exclusion of the Israeli team. This creates the impression that both your team and USA Rugby support the discriminatory treatment of the Heat - in violation of USA Rugby’s values, the values of international sports, and fundamental American values. It would be a significant mistake for you to participate in a discriminatory competition.”

The letter was signed by the Brandeis Center, American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Christians United for Israel Action Fund, Combat Antisemitism Movement, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Israeli-American Coalition for Action, Jewish Federations of North America, Simon Wiesenthal Center, StandWithUs, and Zionist Organization of America. The Brandeis Center is the Heat’s new legal team.

The Heat were confirmed to participate in the tournament for months until BDS activists pressured SARU. In the face of this pressure, SARU quickly reversed itself and excluded the Heat from the competition. The South African BDS Coalition 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 letter emphasizes that sports are meant to be inclusive, and 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.

“Attempts to discriminate against Jewish or Israeli athletes have been unsuccessful in large part because the international community quickly and forcefully expressed their outrage,” noted the organizations. “The Rhinos and USA Rugby must do the same. The United States is a global leader in sports and the host of the 2031 Rugby World Cup. The participation of the Rhinos in the Mzansi Challenge under these circumstances would undermine the ability of USA Rugby to take its proper role in international sports.”

The Brandeis Center, last week, called on the World Rugby Union, which is investigating the matter, to overrule SARU’s discriminatory decision, direct SARU to apologize for its discriminatory act, and impose any sanctions they deem appropriate under the rules. 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.”

The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law is an independent, unaffiliated, nonprofit corporation established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all. LDB engages in research, education, and legal advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses, in the workplace, and elsewhere. It empowers students by training them to understand their legal rights and educates administrators and employers on best practices to combat racism and anti-Semitism. The Brandeis Center is not affiliated with the Massachusetts university, the Kentucky law school, or any of the other institutions that share the name and honor the memory of the late U.S. Supreme Court justice.