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More than 50 Members of Congress Call on Obama Administration to Pursue Ambitious Agenda at Durban Climate Change Summit

Washington D.C. – Just days before the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) summit in Durban, South Africa, 53 members of the House of Representatives have sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner urging the Obama administration to pursue a just and ambitious agenda in the climate talks. The full letter and signers are below.

Signers stress the importance of the upcoming negotiations in South Africa as an opportunity to make progress on addressing climate change. In the letter, members of Congress note that Africa, which is host of this year's summit, is already facing many of the most severe impacts of climate change, including serious threats to food security. The impacts, as members note, do not stop in Africa, however.

"In my home state of New Jersey, where scientists estimate the sea level is rising about one inch every six years, this summer Hurricane Irene forced thousands of residents from their homes and many small businesses to close," said Rep. Donald Payne (D-NJ), Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights, who led the letter.

Irene was the tenth extreme-weather related disaster costing more than \$1 billion in the United States this year. Communities of color and the poor are often the worst hit and last to recover from such devastation.

"Through American leadership, we can help protect the livelihoods of poor people from Newark to Nairobi," Representative Payne added.

The letter was co-led by Representatives Russ Carnahan (D-MO), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Bobby Rush (D-IL), and was signed by Ranking Member of House Foreign Affairs Committee Howard Berman (D-CA), Ranking Member of Energy and Commerce Henry Waxman (D-CA), and the Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO), among others. Underscoring the significance of these negotiations taking place on African soil, the letter was also signed by more than half of the members in the Congressional Black Caucus.

Rep. Bobby Rush, co-chair of the Congressional Black Congress Committee on Energy and Environment, said, "There is no more time for debate. The International Energy Agency report issued last week gives the world less than a decade to shift to clean energy or else suffer even greater global temperature increases and likely devastating climatic impacts. If this esteemed publication is correct, then even during an international economic crisis, delay is folly. The IEA says for every dollar avoided more than

four dollars will be spent to clean up the consequences. We cannot afford to fiddle while the earth burns.”

The letter highlights three key priorities that the Obama Administration should pursue in Durban: Operationalize a fair, transparent and accountable Green Climate Fund.

Support innovative approaches to generate new and additional public finance to help developing countries confront the climate crisis, including in the shipping and aviation sectors.

Reiterate the US commitment made in Copenhagen to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

Rep. Russ Carnahan commented that, “As a food security crisis threatens regions of the African continent, it’s urgent that we reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help disadvantaged communities cope with climate change’s effects. And as we face a jobs crisis here in the United States, creating jobs by investing in manufacturing clean energy technologies that are so needed in developing countries is also essential.”

“It is critical that policy leaders commit to an investment in building climate resilience in vulnerable countries, a reduction in climate-changing emissions, and wide-scale support for communities hardest hit by climate change,” said Congresswoman Barbara Lee, a member of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition in Congress. “Congress needs to get to work passing robust policies that will make these commitments a reality and move forward the global effort to tackle the climate crisis.”

A broad coalition of anti-poverty, environment, faith-based, and human and civil rights advocates who are involved in the ***Stand with Africa*** campaign applauded the Members’ messages to the Obama administration. The groups called on leaders, when they meet on African soil, to stand with communities in Africa and around the world who are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Ilana Solomon, Senior Policy Analyst with ActionAid USA said, “This letter represents a strong push from leading members of Congress calling on the Obama Administration to go to the Durban summit with a just and ambitious position. With climate impacts already threatening the lives and livelihoods of poor and vulnerable communities in Africa and around the world, the Administration must not use politics as an excuse for delaying action.”

“In Durban, the Obama administration has the chance to turn words into actions for the most vulnerable people in the world,” said David Waskow, Climate Program Director for Oxfam America. “We applaud these leaders in Congress for keeping the pressure on and showing that climate action is both necessary and possible.”

Karen Orenstein, International Policy Analyst from Friends of the Earth US said, “This letter demonstrates real concern by many members of Congress for the lives of ordinary people grappling with the effects of a climate crisis they did not cause. The Obama Administration should heed this call and be a force for positive change at the UN climate negotiations in South Africa, rather than an obstacle.”

“As the US delegation lands in South Africa, many in the world are understandably questioning America’s resolve to join the world in tackling the climate crisis,” said Lou Leonard, Managing Director for Climate Change at WWF. “This letter is a strong reminder that key leaders in Congress support an ambitious and just international climate agreement. It’s now up to the Obama Administration to be a leader in Durban.”

Susan Tambi Matambo, International Policy Coordinator with US Climate Action Network said, "Now, more than ever, strong leadership from the Obama administration is paramount to support those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The US has a unique opportunity in Durban to ensure that the Green Climate Fund is operational and provided with the finances required for adaptation, technology transfer and the reduction of deforestation in developing countries."

Stand With Africa partners include: ActionAid USA, Africa Faith and Justice Network, Americans for Informed Democracy, Center for Biological Diversity, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative (EJCC), Foreign Policy in Focus, Friends of the Earth USA, Greenpeace USA, Maryknoll Office for Global Concern, NAACP, Oxfam America, the Sustainable Energy and Economy Network at the Institute for Policy Studies, and World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

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