



Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Secretary Blinken:

I am writing on behalf of JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, a San Francisco, CA based organization representing the heritage and rights of the one million Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) who fled religious persecution or were ethnically cleansed from the region from the 20th century until today. On behalf of our members I would like to extend our congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of State and look forward to working with you to promote and defend the American values of freedom of religion, expression, and rule of law.

Since 2018, [a coalition of 18 leading Jewish organizations including](#): Anti-Defamation League, Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, B'nai Brith International, World Jewish Congress, and Simon Wiesenthal Center have publicly called on the U.S. State Department to encourage the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to explicitly recognize the rights of Jewish and minority heritage when negotiating cultural property agreements with countries in North Africa and the Middle East. On multiple occasions we specifically requested that Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) originating in North Africa and the Middle East include provisions that list and name specific Jewish and Christian items to be excluded from the restricted list of items to be brought in the United States. We also requested that the State Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Heritage adheres to the limitations set by Congress under the Cultural Property Implementation Act by denying broad, excessive import restrictions to nations that have neither valued nor cherished the ancient heritage of Jewish, Christian, and other minority peoples.

It is in this same vein that we request that any regulations to implement the Turkey MOU be frozen or suspended until such time as Turkey recognizes and respects the religious freedom and property of minority populations.

As you know, immediately after his inauguration on January 20th President Biden issued a Memorandum to all Executive Departments and Agencies placing a freeze on any pending rule or regulation issued by the Trump Administration. President Biden's freeze has been necessitated by the Trump Administration's effort to continue to improperly direct US policy after he has left office. One of these ill-conceived measures, signed on January 19th, Trump's last day in office, was a cultural property agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Erdogan Regime in Turkey. That MOU provides de-facto recognition to that government's claims to the personal and communal property of that nation's religious Jewish and Christian minorities.

In fact, the Turkey MOU is consistent with a series of Trump Administration MOUs with authoritarian governments in Libya, Algeria, Jordan, and Yemen that recognize state ownership of all personal and communal property of displaced religious minorities. These MOUs have been contrary to the values of our nation and fail to serve their stated goal of protecting cultural property.

We also request that you suspend the Trump Administration's MOU with Yemen's Saudi-supported government as part of the Biden Administration's disengagement with the Saudi led war in Yemen. The current MOU with Yemen turns a blind eye to not only that government's claims over Jewish religious property, but to its complicity in the shelling and bombing of Yemen's own cultural heritage into dust. Hopefully, a freeze on any implementing regulations for the MOU with Turkey and a suspension of the MOU with Yemen will be an important first step towards ascertaining whether all Trump Administration MOU's with authoritarian MENA governments can be reformed to protect the rights of religious and ethnic minorities to their own property.

Thank you,

Executive Director of JIMENA, Sarah Levin
President of JIMENA, Gina Bublil-Waldman

C.C.

Chair The Cultural Advisory Committee of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Stefan Passantino

Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs Assistant Secretary, Marie Royce

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman, Gregory Meeks

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Chairman, Bob Menendez

Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad Chairman, Paul Packer

