

U.S. still plans to skip summit on racism

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration is set to skip the World Conference on Racism despite the conference's toned-down language on Israel, U.S. officials said.

Objections raised by the Obama administration that a conference document, among other things, asserted Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is grounded in racism, led to revisions and the removal of controversial statements, The Washington Post reported Tuesday. However, the administration's apparent decision not to attend next week's conference in Switzerland has caused frustrations among activist groups.

"For his administration not to be present at this global conversation is a disappointment," Imani Countess, senior director for public affairs at TransAfrica Forum, an advocacy group that tracks U.S. foreign policy, told the Post.

While progress has been made in revising the draft document, the administration still has concerns, White House spokesman Tommy Vietor said.

"We hope that these remaining concerns will be addressed, so that the United States can re-engage the conference negotiations in the hopes of arriving at a conference document that we can support," he said.

TransAfrica sent Obama a letter in which it said U.S. participation in next week's conference in Geneva was

critical "for both symbolic and political reasons," the Post said.

Among the signatories were leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation.

A bipartisan group of seven U.S. House of Representatives members also sent a letter to Obama, saying they support his decision to boycott the meeting.

"We applaud you for making it clear that the United States will not participate in a conference that undermines freedom of expression and is tainted by an anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic agenda," the letter read.

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