United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 5, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madame Secretary:

We are writing to show our strong support for an ambitious outcome from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) summit in Durban, South Africa.

As host to this year's 17th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 17), South Africa plays an important role, not only as a principal forum for discussions on climate change, but also because it represents a region extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Globally, climate change is projected to increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events like droughts. The consequences of these projected impacts can be seen in especially stark terms today in the Horn of Africa, where a major drought has left nearly thirteen million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

A changing climate will affect all aspects of our lives. The many weather-related disasters that occurred in 2011 also underscore the seriousness of climate science projections of increasingly severe floods, droughts, and other disasters. We are vulnerable in the United States, where a record fourteen disasters with greater than $1 billion in damages have occurred this year. But communities living in poverty that have done the least to cause the problem, like many in Africa, are particularly vulnerable and are least able to adapt to these changes without external assistance.

With the impacts of climate change occurring more quickly than previously predicted, we are committed to doing our part to transition to a clean energy economy that decreases carbon pollution, creates jobs, and builds resilience in vulnerable communities both at home and abroad.

In addition to taking action in the United States, we support a strong, coordinated international effort to advance these goals. COP 17 is an important opportunity for the global community to continue to make progress in implementing the Cancun Agreements reached last year in Mexico. There, for the first time, all major greenhouse gas emitting nations, agreed to anchor their commitments to reduce carbon pollution in an international agreement. Building on this, we look forward to an outcome in Durban that provides guidelines for how these actions are measured, reported and verified.

We also encourage the Administration to support innovative approaches to generate additional public and private sources of climate financing. To this end, we support an outcome in Durban that makes progress on contributions from other sources, including international transportation sectors and market mechanisms, and a process for determining how these sectors contribute to the long-term financing target. We also support establishing guidelines for the operation of the Green Climate Fund designed to maximize impact, effectiveness, and efficiency. The Fund should be transparent and accountable and ensure the meaningful participation of affected communities and civil society, while contributing to sustainable, vibrant local economies in developing countries through projects with environmental and social safeguards.

Finally, we look forward to an outcome that includes further discussions on the actions to ensure global temperatures do not rise beyond the two degrees Celsius target, with a review of its adequacy; progress on increasing the resilience of vulnerable developing countries; and strengthened efforts to increase forest conservation and reduce emissions from deforestation.

We look forward to working with you to advance a strong and ambitious package of outcomes from Durban to address the global climate crisis. As the costs and effects of climate change continue to mount, it is critical that the U.S. be an active part of an effective global response.

Sincerely,

John F. Kerry
United States Senator

Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

Joseph I. Lieberman
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Bernie Sanders
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator