

WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION,  
XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

Durban, 31 August - 7 September 2001

Address by Minister Grazyna Bernatowicz,  
Head of the Polish Delegation

1 September 2001

Madame President,  
Esteemed Heads of States, Heads of Governments, Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,

Madame President,

It is with the great satisfaction that we see you elected to this very demanding post of the President of our conference. Please accept our congratulations. You can rely fully on the co-operation of the Polish delegation.

Madame President, It is deeply felt duty to express the deepest thanks to our host, President Thabo Mbeki and the People of the South Africa for unmatched hospitality provided to us. The importance of the contribution made by the authorities of the Republic of South Africa to organising this conference cannot be overrated. The fact we are meeting here in Durban reflects the recognition by all of us here for the great changes that have taken place in this country. The year 2001, the first year of the new century, should also mark the beginning of a better world. A better world is a very ambitious goal, but it is also a beautiful and, I hope, a feasible one as well.

I should like also to express the great esteem in which I hold Ms Mary Robinson for the great pains she has taken to organise this conference. We all know that the road to Durban was not easy, and the fact that we are all here we owe in large part to the efforts of the High Commissioner. Thank you for that.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Racial discrimination contradicts basic human rights. It turns the human being into an object, demeans and destroys his or her dignity. It manifests itself not only in widely publicised crimes against humanity, but also in less spectacular daily gestures, insults, the condemnation

has the main responsibility in protecting human rights, it is not the only party involved in this matter. Democracy and the rule of law foster the creation of a civil society, whose institutions and organisational forms effectively influence changes in society's mentality in the spirit of solidarity, tolerance and mutual respect. What is more, the structures of civil society function where the democratic state cannot and should not intervene.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Racism has left a horrible imprint on Africa and its people, but it is known to people on every continent. The universalization of that experience necessitates universal efforts. For that reason, my country attaches such great importance to the success of the World Conference. We want it to map out new ways of combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance where needed and to improve those means that already exist.

Before we adopt the Action Programme, recommending concrete means of fighting racism, I wish to call attention to the fact that the international community's extensive achievements in this area constitute a good basis for fighting racism. This refers chiefly to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination set up on the basis of that Convention is an invaluable tool whose usefulness has yet to be fully tapped. Its authority has not been recognised by all states that are parties to the Convention. From this podium I therefore wish to appeal to all states that have not already done so to ratify the Convention and begin full co-operation with the Committee.

I also see the necessity of upgrading the performance of the Committee as well as other mechanisms protecting human rights. Only having at one's disposal productive and generally accepted mechanisms can those rights be protected and promoted. In that context, the International Criminal Court is cause for hope. At this point I would like to inform you with pleasure, Madame President, that in Poland the process of ratification has already been accomplished and shortly the instruments of ratification will be deposited with the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of South Africa, in which we find ourselves, has proved to the world that racism can be overthrown with political means, which was specifically heroic achievement after all horrors of apartheid. I trust that this country's example will help to mobilise us deliberating here. I am confident we shall be able to set aside passing, albeit very heated and painful disputes, in order to focus on developing a future-oriented plan to combat racism. And I hope that after this present meeting there will no longer be a need to convene yet another, fourth successive conference.

Thank you for your attention.