



HIGHLIGHTS OF DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

23 April 2009

Ramu Damodaran, Spokesman for the Durban Review Conference, introduced Githu Muigai, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as today's guest speaker.

The Spokesman reported that the Conference continued this morning with the list of speakers inscribed under the general segment after which it would move to hear speakers listed under item 9 – issues arising from the objective of the conference. This list included States, UN officials and human rights mandate holders, as well as some 120 NGOs. To date there were 133 speakers who either spoke already or remained to speak under the high-level and general segments.

Rupert Colville, Spokesman for the OHCHR, read out a statement informing journalists of the decision of the High Commissioner, in her capacity of Secretary-General of the Durban Review Conference, to instruct that the badges of all the participants of three NGOs be removed, thereby effectively preventing their further participation in the Conference, as a result of "unacceptable disruptive behavior" inside the UN premises in Geneva during the course of the Conference, in clear violation of the rules laid down regarding the conduct of NGOs during the conference. The three NGOs are L'Union des Etudiants Juifs de France, the Neda Institute for Political and Scientific Research and COEXIST. The statement also indicated that earlier in the week security staff, acting in accordance with those regulations, removed the badges of a total of 44 NGO participants in the Conference. The breakdown was as follows: 20 participants from the Union des Etudiants Juifs de France; 15 from COEXIST; 4 from the European Union of Jewish students; 2 from the Neda Institute for Political and Scientific Research; 2 from the Women's Association of Followers of Ahlul Baitii; 1 from B'nai Brith. (Additional details were made available in the statement).

In response to a question on the NGO incidents, Mr. Colville pointed out that the disruptions resulting from certain NGO activities continued well after the President of Iran had left. On Monday, the day of the President's speech was delivered, 10 NGO representatives had their badges withdrawn, and on Tuesday, after the Iranian President had left, another 34 NGOs had their badges withdrawn for activities reported on that day. Responding to a follow up, Mr. Colville clarified that none of the three sanctioned NGOs were ECOSOC-accredited NGOs. The clearly orchestrated behavior observed by Conference officials, and the risk of further disruptive behaviour, suggested that the continued participation of individuals accredited to the Conference should be ended. Asked to further clarify the numbers of NGOs affected by these measures, he confirmed that 229 representatives of the three sanctioned NGOs had registered to the Conference although only 64 of these had actually collected their badges thus far. Neither the 64 who had received badges nor the 165 who had not yet done so would be admitted for the last two days of the conference.

Githu Muigai, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, stated that eight years ago in Durban, the international community created an "ambitious and groundbreaking framework to fight all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance". The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action identified like never before the key international, regional and national strategies that need to be implemented in the struggle against racism and focused not only on correcting historical wrongs, but also on addressing current injustices. Racism was well alive all around the world and will only be eradicated by long-term concerted efforts by the international community, as well as



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by specific national strategies by all States, he added. The international community still had a long journey ahead of it if the DDPA were to become a reality for those who suffered the consequences of racism on a daily basis.

Mr. Muigai said he was particularly happy that the outcome document of the Review Conference was adopted by consensus and said he had no doubt that this showed the commitment of all parties engaged in the process to fight racism. The Review Conference should not be seen as the culmination of the Durban process, but rather as the beginning of a new era of international mobilization in the fight against all forms of racism, he added. The key message this Conference sends out to the world is that racism is a global problem which therefore requires global solutions. The Special Rapporteur said he was of the view that the parties who chose not to participate in the Conference should re-engage in the process and share their views and ideas on fighting racism and called upon these countries to return to the international movement against racism. In particular, he called upon the United States and President Obama to provide leadership in this process, building on the unique domestic experience of the United States in fighting racism.

Responding to a question, Mr. Muigai recalled that existing international human rights law recognized that incitement to religious hatred and to racial hatred was prohibited and encouraged domestic legal systems to develop laws that prohibited that. The freedom of expression was a fundamental right which was very critical to any open and democratic society and one that should be safeguarded and only could only be restricted in very clearly defined terms. Equally important was the right of persons to pursue their religious beliefs within a legal process to protect their right to believe what they chose to. It was not appropriate for laws to be used as an instrument for the protection of a body of beliefs. In response to another question, the Special Rapporteur affirmed that the DDPA and the review document emphasized the necessity of all parties to work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination included and not limited to xenophobic and related intolerances.

Asked for his views on possible lessons learned from the current conference, Mr. Muigai said, for him, the most important lesson has been the necessity to keep inflammatory ideological debates away from concrete, technical work that really needed to be done on the issue of racism. Many of the issues that came to dominate the debate had nothing to do with the debate on racism. There was a necessity to move now from clarifying the framework on the international level to domestic implementation of the agreed upon programmes. Mr. Muigai drew attention to the fact that he had had recent discussions with delegations on the problem of discrimination in sport which was a very concrete problem staring us in the face on a daily basis and which deserved increased attention.

Responding to another question, the Special Rapporteur said institutional racism was one of the most serious impediments in the struggle against racism; there were many parts of the world where this was so. The discrimination of Roma in Europe was one such example of institutional racism. Racism was most insidious where the instrumentality of the State was used to reinforce it, he added. Asked whether he had any information as to is there would be another Durban conference, he said he had no information on this, although drew attention to the fact that the adopted outcome document called for further follow up measures. If and when it was determined that the time had come to review the progress made that issue would likely be addressed. In response to a further question, Mr. Muigai said it was not possible to make specific references in the adopted outcome document to specific conflicts or country situations. It was evident to him that the delegations that endorsed the document were conscious of the conflicts persisting around the world.

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