

DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE OPENS

United Nations Secretary-General Appeals to the International Community to Move Ahead in the Fight against Racism

The Durban Review Conference, which will review progress and assess implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, opened this morning, hearing a statement by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in which he appealed to the international community to grow beyond its divisions and move ahead in the fight against racism.

Secretary-General Ban said there came a time in the affairs of humankind when all should stand firm on the fundamental principles that bound them. There came a time to re-affirm faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of all, a time to give the virtues of tolerance and respect for diversity their fullest due and look beyond a past that divided toward a future that united. That time was now. The Durban Declaration and the Programme of Action committed the international community to work together to combat racism in all its manifestations. Racism was a denial of human rights, pure and simple. Humanity's long march in its campaign against racism had never been easy. The international community needed to build on the progress already made and grow beyond the divisions that prevented it from moving ahead.

Francisco Jose Lacayo, Senior Advisor to the President of the General Assembly, delivering a statement on behalf of the President of the United Nations General Assembly Miguel d'Escoto, said the most terrible of experiences of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance had been generated by models and projects of development that were opposed to human rights. It was pertinent that the major crisis today came from the same patterns and was capable of generating more new and more terrible forms of discrimination. It was urgent to return to the same values that made the most important Declaration possible: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The event today was closely linked to the search for effective solutions.

Martin Ihoeghian Uhomobhi, President of the Human Rights Council, said the belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race was not only immoral but had proved a particularly dangerous ideology in human history. Such beliefs denied the self-evident truth that all men were born free and equal in dignity and rights. They denied justice and equal opportunities to the victims of hate and bigotry, including the respect and happiness every person was entitled to enjoy as a human being. Through the instrumentality of the United Nations, the international community had responded to the challenge of racism through robust efforts to establish principles and mechanisms that sought to set high moral standards for human conduct and to guard against racism in all its manifestations.

Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Secretary-General of the Conference, said racism and racial discrimination attacked the very

foundations of a person's dignity, for they sought to divide the human family into categories of people, some of which were considered more worthy than others. Discrimination in all its aspects must be denounced and forcefully rejected every time it reared its odious head, whether in the guise of political opportunism, cultural *mores* or specious arguments presented as scientific evidence. History had proved time and again that, when allowed to take root, discrimination, racism and intolerance shattered the very foundations of societies and damaged them for generations. This week the international community had the opportunity to take a significant step forward in the fight against racism, a fight that served the interest of justice, dignity and equality everywhere.

Al Shaymaa J. Kwegyir, Member of the National Assembly of Tanzania, speaking on behalf of Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, said the work here would contribute to the advancement of the noble struggle for equality and justice, a struggle that they had to wage tirelessly, irrespective of the obstacles that they would inevitably encounter. The September 2001 Conference against Racism, held in Durban, and the resultant Durban Declaration and Programme of Action had been hailed as providing the most comprehensive framework of our time to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. This Review Conference was an opportunity not only to assess the progress the world had made in translating into action the commitment made in Durban in 2001, but to renew their spirit and strengthen their will to turn the goals they set eight years ago into reality.

Amos Wako, the Attorney General of Kenya, who was elected President of the Conference, said today the international community gathered here united with the resolve that every human being had a right to live a life of dignity as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Victims in all parts of the world continued to suffer daily from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and were looking to them to create a fresh impetus that would lead to the improvement of their lives and to provide relief from the effects of these scourges. It was his hope that this conference would be yet another historic and important landmark in the journey towards the elimination of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The Review Conference elected other officers, including 20 Vice-Chairpersons or Members of the Bureau. It also adopted its rules of procedure, the agenda and organization of work. A credentials committee was appointed, and a Main Committee and a Drafting Committee were established. Najat Al-Hajjaji of Libya was elected to the post of the Chairperson of the Main Committee, Yury Boychenko of the Russian Federation was elected to the post of the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee, and Juan Antonio Fernandez of Cuba was elected as Rapporteur-General of the Durban Review Conference.

The World Conference against Racism, held in 2001 in Durban, South Africa, adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which provided an important new framework for guiding governments, non-governmental organizations and other institutions in their efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action encompassed far-reaching measures to combat racism in all its manifestations, including strengthening education, fighting poverty, securing development, improving the remedies and resources available to victims of racism, and bolstering respect for the rule of law and for human rights.

The Conference will start its high-level segment this afternoon at 3 p.m.

Opening Statements

BAN KI-MOON, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said there came a time in the affairs of humankind when all should stand firm on the fundamental principles that bound them. There came a time to re-affirm faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of all, a time to give the virtues of tolerance and respect for diversity their fullest due and look beyond a past that divided toward a future that united. That time was now. The international community faced immense challenges in these difficult times, on many fronts. Among the most pressing today was the fight against racism and all forms of racial discrimination. Despite decades of advocacy, despite the efforts of many groups and many nations, despite ample evidence of racism's terrible toll - racism still persisted.

The international community dreamt of moving in a new direction, yet too many clung to the past, the Secretary-General said. The international community remained weak and divided and stuck in old ways. All gathered here today welcomed the dawning era of a new multilateralism - less confrontation and more dialogue, less ideology and more common understanding. If ever there were such a moment, it was now. If ever there were a cause in which all could believe, this was it - a truly great and noble cause that bound as human beings.

Mr. Ban said the Durban Declaration and the Programme of Action committed the international community to work together to combat racism in all its manifestations. Racism was a denial of human rights, pure and simple. It may be institutionalized, as the Holocaust would always remind the world. Alternately, it may express itself less formally as the hatred of a particular people or a class - as anti-Semitism, for example, or the newer "Islamophobia." Such intolerance was seen in national histories that denied the identity of others, or that rejected rightful grievances of minorities who might not share a so-called "official history." It was emerging in new forms such as human trafficking, whose victims tended to be women and children of low socio-economic status. A new politics of xenophobia was on the rise. New technologies proliferated hate-speech.

Discrimination did not go away by itself, the Secretary-General said. It must be challenged. Otherwise it could become a cause of social unrest and violence. There should be special vigilance during this time of economic trouble. Today's economic crisis, if not handled properly, could evolve into a full-scale political crisis marked by social unrest, weakened governments and angry publics who had lost faith in their leaders and their own future. In such circumstances, the consequences for communities already victimized by prejudice or exclusion could be frightening indeed.

Secretary-General Ban said the Universal Declaration of Human Rights held all human beings to be created equal, born free and endowed with inalienable human rights. All here were signatories and were duty-bound to do their utmost to defend its principles, and they were very much at stake in this hall today. The international community had come a long way in its efforts to produce a consensual text of common meaning and common commitment for all nations. It was regrettable that, for some, it had come up short. Yet these lingering differences could be overcome.

All countries should see this as the beginning of a process rather than an end. Unless they participated, their views could not be heard or accounted for. Humanity's long march in its campaign against racism had never been easy. The international community needed to build on the progress already made and grow beyond the divisions that prevented it from moving ahead.

FRANCISCO JOSE LACAYO, delivering a message on behalf of the President of the United Nations General Assembly MIGUEL D'ESCOTO, thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights for having convened this meeting to reaffirm their commitment to the fight against racism and discrimination. He said that now, more than six decades after the establishment of the United Nations, a few months after the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and eight years after the first Durban Review Conference, they were in one of the biggest crises of mankind. The world's peoples stood united and were decided to make this Durban Review Conference a milestone in this decisive moment of the history of mankind. The world's peoples continued experiencing traditional and new forms of discrimination that had been clearly denounced as such at the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001. The President of the General Assembly congratulated those countries that had taken measures to guarantee the rights of the victims of racism, discrimination and related forms of intolerance to reparation and invited all others to do the same.

In his message, the President of the General Assembly invited countries to reaffirm, as had been done at the Conference in 2001, the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State and called on States to support the peace process. Today, as eight years ago, it was valid to say that racism, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance could be aggravated by an unequal distribution of wealth, marginalization and social exclusion. If these injustices inherent to the economic and social systems were not resolved, they would certainly continue to harvest the fruits of destruction and death that they had sown, the President had said at the anniversary of the Rwanda genocide. The President had added that the seeds of genocide had been sown long before and were the result of colonial policies that institutionalized ethnic resentments. The most terrible of experiences of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance had been generated by models and projects of development that were opposed to human rights. It was pertinent that the major crisis today came from the same patterns and was capable of generating more new and more terrible forms of discrimination.

MARTIN IHOEGHIAN UHOMOIBHI, President of the Human Rights Council, said the belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race was not only immoral but had proved a particularly dangerous ideology in human history. Such beliefs denied the self-evident truth that all men were born free and equal in dignity and rights. They denied justice and equal opportunities to the victims of hate and bigotry, including the respect and happiness every person was entitled to enjoy as a human being. Despite its manifest ugliness, the repulsive creed that ethnicity must determine the worth of the human person had persisted through the ages. Racism had historically been a devious, treacherous and deceitful practice. It remained so today. As an ideology, it justified persecutions, oppression and death. It had fostered systems of legal segregation in the form of institutional racism, effectively discriminating against populations and entrenching economic and social exclusion.

Through the instrumentality of the United Nations, the international community had responded to the challenge of racism through robust efforts to establish principles

and mechanisms that sought to set high moral standards for human conduct and to guard against racism in all its manifestations. Those mechanisms served as important tools to fight ignorance and disregard for cultural and ethnic diversities. One of the more significant efforts in this direction was the International Convention on the Eliminations of all Forms of Discrimination, noted Mr. Uhomoibhi, which was adopted in 1965 and entered into force four years after. Building on that, the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination was established to monitor the implementation of the Convention by its State Parties. Ever since, various efforts had been made at the international, regional and national levels, all aimed at promoting universal adherence to the provisions of this important Convention.

NAVI PILLAY, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the main reason for this gathering was to engage in a celebration of tolerance and diversity: this was the imperative and overarching goal that must motivate the international community above narrowly-focused political considerations and calculations. Work at the Durban Review Conference would represent a historic milestone in the fight against racism, and would ultimately convince all those Member States who chose to stay away to rejoin their efforts on the anti-racism agenda at a later stage of this ongoing process.

Racism and racial discrimination attacked the very foundations of a person's dignity, for they sought to divide the human family into categories of people, some of which were considered more worthy than others. Discrimination in all its aspects must be denounced and forcefully rejected every time it reared its odious head, whether in the guise of political opportunism, cultural *mores* or specious arguments presented as scientific evidence. History had proved time and again that, when allowed to take root, discrimination, racism and intolerance shattered the very foundations of societies and damaged them for generations. Even though guarantees of non-discrimination were enshrined in every international human rights standard, laws in some countries, and practice in many, in all regions of the world, still permitted or tolerated discrimination. Racial discrimination was one of the most widely occurring human rights violations and may even be intensifying as a result of resurgent prejudices and fear, as well as competition over scarce resources and employment opportunities.

Eight years ago, in Durban, South Africa, the struggle against racial hatred, discrimination and intolerance moved forward when States adopted by consensus the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action had been affected by a number of challenges. The World Conference in 2001 emphasized that poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion and economic disparities were closely associated with racism, and contributed to the persistence of racist attitudes and practices. In turn, each and all of these factors perpetuated vicious cycles of exclusion and poverty undermining simultaneously human rights, development, and security. The convergence of the global food emergency, the economic and financial crises, and the effects of climate change had exacerbated entrenched prejudices and tensions or brought to the surface latent intolerance. In some cases this had unleashed racist attacks.

Not everyone has chosen to attend this Conference, yet Ms. Pillay said she was confident that it would be a success. She also hoped that all Member States who did not participate would still join efforts to make tangible changes in the lives of so

many victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in all parts of the world. This week the international community had the opportunity to take a significant step forward in the fight against racism, a fight that served the interest of justice, dignity and equality everywhere. The eyes of the world are upon the Conference, and it would be judged harshly indeed should this historic opportunity not be fully seized.

AL SHAYMAA J. KWEGYIR, Member of the National Assembly of Tanzania, delivering a message on behalf of NELSON MANDELA, former President of South Africa, said that the work here would contribute to the advancement of the noble struggle for equality and justice, a struggle that they had to wage tirelessly, irrespective of the obstacles that they would inevitably encounter. The September 2001 Conference against Racism, held in Durban, and the resultant "Durban Declaration and Programme of Action" had been hailed as providing the most comprehensive framework of our time to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. In South Africa, they had learned that discrimination against and the stigmatization of one part of the population devalued the humanity not only of the victims, but of all the people of their country. This Review Conference was an opportunity not only to assess the progress the world had made in translating into action the commitment made in Durban in 2001, but to renew their spirit and strengthen their will to turn the goals they set eight years ago into reality. It was also an opportunity to engage with and draw in a new leadership, with new visions, that had emerged in nations crucial to this endeavour.

AMOS WAKO, President of the Durban Review Conference, said that he considered it a great honour and responsibility to have been elected as President of the Durban Review Conference. He was grateful to all Member States for the support and confidence that they had placed in him by electing him to the post of President of this important conference. Today they gathered here united with the resolve that every human being had a right to live a life of dignity as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Victims in all parts of the world continued to suffer daily from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and were looking to them to create a fresh impetus that would lead to the improvement of their lives and provide relief from the effects of these scourges.

Eight years ago at the Durban World Conference, which he attended, they adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which was the most ambitious platform of action ever developed by the international community to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It was his hope that this conference would be yet another historic and important landmark in the journey towards the elimination of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It was only in this way that the oneness of the family of human race, united in diversity, based on love and respect and with each member of the human race enjoying all his and her inherent indivisible human rights, would be realized. He was confident that with all of them knowing how important this Conference was for each and every person of the human race and imbued with the spirit of success, they were going to have a successful conference.