

HIGHLIGHTS OF DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

Monday, 20 April 2009

Ramu Damodaran, Spokesman for the Durban Review Conference, informed journalists that the Conference had opened in the morning with [statements](#) by the UN Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the President of the Human Rights Council and messages from the President of the UN General Assembly and by Nelson Mandela. In his remarks, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon referred to the Conference as the “beginning of a process” and said “the [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#) committed the international community to work together to combat racism in all its manifestations...The international community needed to build on the progress already made and grow beyond the divisions that prevented it from moving ahead”, he added.

The high-level segment, Mr. Damodaran reported, would begin in the afternoon at 3 p.m. and last until tomorrow, during which some 50 ministers and vice-ministers were inscribed to speak. Additionally, one head of State, the President of Iran, and one head of government, the Prime Minister of Namibia, were listed to participate in the high-level segment. Moreover, another 37 States were listed to speak under the general segment, to begin tomorrow immediately following the conclusion of the high-level segment. The Conference this morning also elected, by acclamation, at the initial proposal by South Africa and seconded by India, Amos Wako, Attorney-General of Kenya, to serve as President of the Durban Review Conference.

Mr. Damodaran also drew attention to a number of [side events](#) scheduled between today and tomorrow among which was one organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights entitled “Voices: Everyone affected by racism has a story that should be heard”, taking place from 2:30 to 4 p.m. this afternoon. As of this morning, 4,777 participants had registered to the Conference; these included representatives from 102 States, 417 non-governmental organizations and over 100 members of the media. (These figures do not reflect those already in possession of grounds passes to access the UN Office at Geneva).

Rupert Colville, Spokesman for the OHCHR, reminded journalists of the statement issued yesterday through which the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, said she was “shocked” by the United States withdrawal from the Conference. While noting that there were gross misperceptions being reported about the Conference and the outcome document and Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, he urged journalists to carefully read the documents and not simply report what has already been voiced through the media when producing their own reports.

Yuri Boychenko, Chairman of the Inter-sessional open-ended intergovernmental working Group mandated to continue and finalize the process of negotiations and drafting of the outcome document to the Conference, which was adopted by the Preparatory Committee to the Conference last Friday, responding to a question about the “boycott” of the Conference by some States affirmed that there was nothing in the [outcome document](#) negotiated by the drafting committee which should prevent any State from participating. The boycott was a “signal of the lack of political will and the willingness to seriously address problems of racism and racial discrimination” throughout the world.

Responding to another question, Mr. Boychenko said the measure of success of the Conference to him was not who attended but rather for a longer-term goal of the Conference of addressing acts of racism and racial discrimination wherever they occur. “We drafted a document which I hope will address plenty of problems States are facing at the national level and internationally in this sphere which the Conference is devoted to...The Conference is already successful. More than 100 States are participating and thousands of participants from civil society. This very much indicates the importance of the Conference”.

In response to another question on the boycott, Mr. Colville said it was strongly hoped that this bump in the road would be the last major one and that the Conference would be able to get on with helping victims of racism as it aimed to do. Referring to a remark made by the Secretary-General in his speech this morning, Mr. Damodaran said Mr. Ban had deeply regretted that some have chosen to stand aside and hoped they would not stay out for long.

Re-visiting the issue of misconceptions noted in the press, Mr. Colville reminded journalists that the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action was, in fact, adopted by consensus and, along with the current document being discussed at the present conference, contained no anti-Semitic references whatsoever.

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