



DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE - GENEVA 2009

BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE DURBAN REVIEW PROCESS

Why the Process is Important

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are problems that occur on a daily basis in every part of the world, hindering progress in the lives of millions of people. From impeding the employment opportunities of individuals and making it difficult for them to enjoy the basic human right of equality to fuelling ethnic hatred that ends in genocide, racism and related intolerance destroy lives. Advancing the struggle against them is imperative.

The Durban Review Conference provides an opportunity to assess and accelerate progress on implementation of measures adopted at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa.

The outcome document of the 2001 World Conference, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), which was adopted by consensus, is the most comprehensive and valuable framework for addressing racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It encompasses far-reaching measures to combat racism in all its manifestations, calling for tougher anti-discrimination legislation and administrative measures; for better education, access to health and administration of justice; for greater efforts to fight poverty and secure development; for improved remedies and resources available to victims of racism; and for greater multiculturalism and respect for the rule of law and human rights.



An indigenous Australian girl plants painted hand cut-outs in the ground, in Durban South Africa during the World Conference against Racism, 2001

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The World Conference against Racism and the DDPA have already contributed to important developments in the battle against racism, including the adoption of legislation and creation of national institutions to combat racism, most notably in Latin American and Caribbean countries, that have helped to reduce discrimination; important constitutional changes in Nepal; improving the lives of thousands of members of minority groups across Asia through greater NGO networking; providing justice to descendents of victims through national government apologies; and influencing legislation in the European Union that will promote the rights of minorities and other vulnerable groups.

As well as assessing progress on the Durban commitments, the Review Process will help to identify gaps in implementation, enable Governments and civil society to share and benefit from good practices, and provide an opportunity to outline concrete ways to make a difference on the ground. The Durban Review Conference is also a vital step in reaffirming not only that racism exists in all countries but that it is the responsibility of all governments and societies to address it.

Given the critical importance of the issues under discussion at the Conference, broad participation is essential. Lack of participation in the review conference would risk undoing some of the progress made as a result of the DDPA; it would send a message to victims of racial and related discrimination, as well as to those who perpetuate racism, that the issue was no longer prominent on the international political agenda. Moreover, only by active participation can States influence the outcome of the conference.

The decision to hold a Review Conference

The decision to convene the Durban Review Conference was made by UN Member States at a General Assembly meeting in 2006. The General Assembly requested the UN Human Rights Council to prepare the process and the Human Rights Council therefore constituted a Preparatory Committee of the Conference. The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) is charged with organization of the conference and overseeing negotiations on an outcome document and is open to participation by all Member States. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was appointed by the UN Secretary-General to serve as Secretary-General of the Conference and her Office (OHCHR) functions as its Secretariat.

Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other civil society actors are essential in combating all forms of racism and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, which is the Secretariat of the Conference) is encouraging their participation in the review process. OHCHR is making several UN venues available for the organization of side events by NGOs during the Review Conference and is organizing a series of events that will highlight the issues being discussed at the conference, such as the rights of indigenous peoples, the link between racism and poverty, and policing in diverse societies. All of these events will enable a large number of stakeholders to exchange views and share best practices on the issues at the heart of the Durban review process. To facilitate the participation of as many NGOs as possible, OHCHR is also assisting many of them with travel expenses.

ABOUT OHCHR:

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a part of the United Nations Secretariat, has been given a unique mandate to promote and protect all human rights. Headquartered in Geneva, the Office is also present in some 40 countries. Headed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a position established by the General Assembly in 1993 to spearhead the United Nations' human rights efforts, OHCHR takes action based on the unique mandate given it by the international community to guard and advocate for international human rights law. For more information please visit www.ohchr.org