

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT MEETING COMMEMORATING
10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION
OF THE DURBAN DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION
New York, 22 September 2011**

Your Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly,
Your Excellency Mr. Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ms. Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years ago, in adopting the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action against Racism, the international community acknowledged that no country could claim to be free of discrimination and intolerance.

Ten years later, this is still the case.

Certainly we have come a long way.

We have seen new laws enacted; new institutions pursuing justice; new initiatives promoting dialogue; new mindsets taking hold.

We are better prepared to prosecute and protect against grave crimes such as genocide, apartheid, ethnic cleansing and contemporary forms of slavery.

Our antennae are better attuned to see the insidious forms of discrimination -- the subtle, face-to-face interactions and institutionalized prejudice that can be every bit as destructive as outright aggressive behavior.

Yet we must acknowledge that intolerance has increased in many parts of the world over the past decade. The resurgence and persistence of such inhumane attitudes and detrimental practices indicate that we have not done enough to stem the tide.

You have before you a global action plan that includes recommendations for combating discrimination against Africans and persons of African descent, Asians and persons of Asian descent, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, minorities, the Roma and others.

Let us do more to embrace diversity and safeguard these groups' dignity. I welcome this year's observance of the International Year for People of African Descent, and the many constructive initiatives it has generated.

Let us stand firmly against anti-Semitism.

We must oppose Islamophobia, and reject discrimination against Christians. Bias based on religious identity has no place in our world.

Let us defend the rights of all, without distinction of any kind, as the Universal Declaration proclaims.

Neither race, colour or language... not political or other opinion... not property, birth or other status... none of these should be a barrier to the enjoyment of rights and freedoms.

Let us also stay in the vanguard against bigotry -- and commit to fighting discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation.

Victims of prejudice must be at the centre of our efforts, as the theme of this event rightly indicates.

Our battle for mutual respect and understanding is no feel-good exercise; the stakes are high indeed.

Ignorance and intolerance are among the root causes of conflicts.

Racism and discrimination are major obstacles to development.

All too often we see a vicious cycle, in which discrimination leads to deprivation, and poverty deepens discrimination. A marked characteristic of virtually all extremely poor communities is that they lack equal access to state institutions and services.

Hard economic times such as these only exacerbate the situation. Competition for jobs and other difficulties often trigger hostility towards migrants and minorities.

Governments have to ensure that unemployment and deteriorating living standards do not provide excuses for attacks on vulnerable groups.

We must resist polarizing politicians who play on people's fears and use stereotypes to gain electoral advantage.

Excellencies,

We are all aware that the original Durban conference and its follow-up two years ago caused immense controversy. On this anniversary, let us re-state some basic principles.

This process is meant to further the world's essential fight against racism.

We should condemn anyone who uses this platform to subvert that effort with inflammatory rhetoric, baseless assertions and hateful speech.

Our common commitment must be to focus on the real problems of racism and intolerance.

Let us strive to ensure dignity, equality and justice for all.

Let us work hand in hand with the civil society groups that are so central to this cause.

Let us work in harmony ... to promote harmony.

Thank you.