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Meeting Summary

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Durban Review Conference
MORNING

RC/09/9/REV.1
23 April 2009

DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE HEARS FROM NATIONAL DELEGATIONS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS UNDER GENERAL DEBATE

Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium Addresses the Meeting

The Durban Review Conference this morning concluded its general debate after hearing from a long series national delegations and other stakeholders who raised a variety of issues relating to the importance of fully implementing the provisions of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and dealing with new forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

During the meeting, the Review Conference resumed briefly its high-level segment to hear the statement of Karel De Gucht, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, who said that the Review Conference was supposed to evaluate the progress made in the fight against racism and discrimination, and it was necessary to admit that racism persisted, including in Belgium. In certain regions of the world, people continued to suffer from discrimination in employment and housing, people were killed because they dared change their religion, and women were the victims of discrimination. Belgium had solid legislation to fight against racism and all forms of discrimination. However, this should be accompanied by increased vigilance and constant commitment to ensure a free and tolerant society.

Mr. De Gucht said it was necessary to condemn without reserve the intolerant and hate-filled declarations of the Iranian President at this rostrum. These declarations were contrary to the principles and values of the United Nations, and were shocking, contradicting both the letter and the spirit of the outcome document. Those who defended intolerant and radical positions should not be allowed to take the Conference hostage. Similar sentiments were expressed by a number of speakers in the general segment.

Speakers in the general segment expressed a variety of sentiments and raised a number of issues. Some said it was not plausible or acceptable to witness the prevalence in many countries of the manifestations of racism and racial discrimination. The Review Conference was an opportunity of assessing failures in order to gain new victories in eliminating racism. Prejudice based on religion, culture, lack of knowledge, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief were detrimental to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the promotion of peaceful culture. Commensurate remedies for the evils of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance required that all United Nations Member States showed real political will to apply them fully. There was no contradiction in simultaneously protecting people against racial discourse and incitement to racial and religious hatred, and ensuring that freedom of expression remained one of the key pillars of society.

The increasing frequency of attacks on religious personalities and symbols, especially in some countries, were fomenting and spreading hatred and aggravating intolerance, speakers said. While respecting and esteeming the principle of freedom of expression, it was unacceptable that freedom of expression should be protected and defended at the expense of other violations of human rights. One speaker said developed countries, which were mainly responsible for the financial crisis, should cancel the debt of African countries as a way of making up for the exploitation of the continent for hundreds of years. Poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion and economic disparities were closely linked to racism and other intolerances. Racism perpetuated poverty and

underdevelopment since it marginalized and excluded populations from having equal opportunities to development.

Speaking in the general segment were representatives of Togo, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Republic of Korea, Portugal, Rwanda, Slovenia, Guatemala, Guyana, Benin, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luxembourg, Turkey, Afghanistan, Angola, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Denmark.

Representatives of the Pan-African Parliament, League of Arab States, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Labour Organization, the African Union, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, UNAIDS, Inter-American Development Bank, and the Non-Aligned Movement Centre for Human Rights and Cultural Diversity also took the floor.

Also speaking were Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan (via video conference) and Edna Maria Santos Roland, two of the five Independent Eminent Experts appointed by the Secretary-General to follow-up the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action; Naela Gabr, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; Zonke Zanele Majodina, Vice-Chair of the Human Rights Committee; Asma Jahangir, Chair of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures; Mohammed Al-Tarawneh, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Fatimata-Binta Dah, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; Joe Frans, Chair of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent; and a representative of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

Japan spoke in right of reply.

The Review Conference today is meeting non-stop from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.. When it continued its work at 2:30 p.m., it started its discussion on issues arising from the objectives of the Conference.

General Segment

ABDELAHAD GAMALELDIN, of the Pan-African Parliament, said Africa sent a message of love and respect to Governments, non-governmental organizations and all organizations participating in the work of the Review Conference. The Pan-African Parliament worked to respond to the needs and dreams of the African peoples for progress, regional integration and unity, and was hopeful for the establishment of an international system free of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and free of double standards and violations of international legitimacy. The Pan-African Parliament fully endorsed the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the outcome document. All should commit themselves to previous pacts and instruments which aimed at protecting the human rights of individuals and preserving their humanity. It was not plausible or acceptable to witness the prevalence in many countries of the manifestations of racism and racial discrimination. Developed countries, which were mainly responsible for the financial crisis, should cancel the debt of African countries as a way of making up for the exploitation of the continent for hundreds of years.

NAKPA POLO (Togo) said the Government of Togo was determined to support all initiatives to protect and promote respect for human dignity and ensure a solid culture of peace in the world. Togo supported the international system to protect and promote human rights, and had shown this by ratifying all international human rights instruments, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Durban Conference was an important stage in mankind, and was a clear expression of mankind's rejection of racism and its various forms of contemporary manifestations. Equality and the enjoyment of human rights remained a great challenge for humankind. Human rights and dignity were the same for all, and they could not be denied on the basis of sex, ethnicity, culture, religion, or caste. The United Nations was constantly making efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination, nevertheless, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance were breaking out anew in all parts of the world. Arguments on the supposed inequality of cultures continued to wreak havoc. This Conference was an opportunity of assessing failures in order to gain new victories in eliminating racism.

OTHMAN HASHIM (Malaysia) reaffirmed Malaysia's full support for the mechanisms established by the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Malaysia firmly believed that the establishment

of those mechanisms provided the international community with the needed space to ensure constant monitoring and action-oriented discussion on racism and related issues, including new and emerging forms of racial discrimination and xenophobia. The Government pursued policies towards fostering national unity, improving nation integration, promoting a culture of respect and tolerance and reducing tendencies toward racial polarisation among the population. An important area of primary focus for the Government's efforts in fighting against racism was education, and it was investing heavily in education. On average, 6 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product had been allocated to education over the years. Malaysia was ready to continue working with all parties to contribute further to the ongoing efforts of the international community to fight all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance.

United Nations, and were shocking, contradicting both the letter and the spirit of the outcome document. Those who defended intolerant and radical positions should not be allowed to take the Conference hostage. The Conference was supposed to evaluate the progress made in the fight against racism and discrimination, and it was necessary to admit that racism persisted, including in Belgium. In certain regions of the world, people continued to suffer from discrimination in employment and housing, people were killed because they dared change their religion, and women were the victims of discrimination.

Belgium had solid legislation to fight against racism and all forms of discrimination, however, this should be accompanied by increased vigilance and constant commitment to ensure a free and tolerant society. The final result of the Conference represented, of course, a compromise, the fruit of difficult and tense negotiations, and thus could not respond to the needs of all. Neither did the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. However, it did have the merit of constituting a solid basis to fight against racism and discrimination, despite the excesses caused by extremist and unacceptable statements. The international community should continue to work for cooperation and multilateral action when a civil population was the victim of grave human rights violations, and should continue to be committed to international law, which was, for these victims, the ultimate recourse allowing them at least some form of justice. Democracy was a universal value, and equality between individuals was a universal principle.

Racism and intolerance could push human beings to commit the worst atrocities. The Holocaust had been commemorated on Monday, and this April brought the fifteenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, and thus the international community should spare a thought for all victims of racism and discrimination everywhere in the world. The outcome document could only make a difference for the victims if the international community lived up to its responsibilities and truly implemented the commitments that it accepted therein. This was the duty before the international community as a whole. Belgium, in this context, would continue to work for a greater multilateral cooperation, and effective multilateralism.

General Segment

FESSAHAZION PIETROS (Eritrea) said that the Durban Review Document was another milestone in humanity's struggle and search for solutions that would foster harmonious coexistence of peoples, based on mutual respect and tolerance. All human beings were born free and equal in dignity and rights. Any doctrine of racial superiority should not only be rejected, but the fight against it must be unrelenting by all stakeholders. The Review Conference gave the international community once more another important opportunity to further crystallize their commitments and intensify the struggle in confronting their common concern in order to collectively search for ways and means to eliminate racism. Racism, with its deep-rooted tentacles in all phases of peoples' lives, was known to continue to affect the political, social, economic and cultural situations of millions of people in many regions of the world. Remedies for and the struggle against those phenomena must therefore be sought for and promoted at all levels of human interactions. Poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, and economic disparities were closely linked to racism and other intolerances. Racism perpetuated poverty and underdevelopment since it marginalized and excluded populations from having equal opportunities to development.

LEE SUNG-JOO (Republic of Korea) said that the outcome document held universal validity, offering an effective guideline for the fight against racial discrimination regardless of region or ethnicity. A delicate balance had been struck between exercising the freedom of expression and taking responsibility for its consequences. There would be an opportunity to discuss ways and means to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of the follow-up mechanisms to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in the Human Rights Council. For this reason, the Republic of Korea welcomed the fact that the outcome document was adopted by consensus. One should not tolerate intolerance, but rather unite against any attempt to politicize this Conference and to use this forum to incite hatred and division. Korean society was becoming increasingly diverse, and appropriate administrative and legislative measures to ensure the smooth integration of foreigners had been taken. For example, among other things, the Government had enacted the law on Support for Multicultural Families to protect the human rights of foreigners, including migrant workers and their children living in the Republic of Korea.

FRANCISCO XAVIER ESTEVES (Portugal) said racial discrimination was a denial of one of the most fundamental rights - the right to equality, which led to a denial of countless other human rights

against racism, Luxembourg being a member of the European Union, was in conformity with the European Union's policy. Since the first Durban Conference, Luxembourg had implemented an annual information and awareness raising campaign on the fight against discrimination. Racism was a scourge that concerned us all and no State was above criticism.

AHMET UZUMCU (Turkey) said that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action constituted the basis of policies to fight racism. The Review Conference provided an opportunity to evaluate the implementation of these policies at the national and international levels as well as to address shortcomings in a self-critical manner. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance constituted an attack on human dignity. Polarization along religious and cultural lines had grown over the past decade. There was no contradiction in simultaneously protecting people against racial discourse and incitement to racial and religious hatred, and ensuring that freedom of expression remained one of the key pillars of society. The discrimination and violence increasingly affecting migrants remained a serious challenge. Having more than four million

ARNOLD DE FINE SKIBSTED (Denmark) said that the focus of the Review Conference should be racism, discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and how to combat these scourges. It was thus a deeply worrying paradox that this rostrum was abused to advocate racism and intolerance by the President of Iran on Monday. The remarks relating in particular to Israel had been so abominable that Denmark had had to react. The intervention had to be understood as incitement to hatred and ran counter to the whole purpose of the Review Conference.

Denmark had from the outset been committed to making the Review Conference a success. Numerous efforts to divert the focus of the Conference had been made, noted the delegate. This included attempts to restrict the fundamental right of freedom of opinion and expression. Denmark would never accept such limitations. Freedom of expression was one of the cornerstones of human dignity and the basis of any democratic society. Denmark was thus satisfied that the fundamental role of freedom of expression had been recognized in the outcome document as one of the essential foundations of a democratic, pluralistic society.

SAAD ALFARARGI, of the League of Arab States, said regarding hostility to religion, particularly Islamophobia, that practices went beyond ethnical and moral grounds. The League of Arab States condemned Israel's practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as Israel clearly was violating human rights and international humanitarian law. The Palestinians who lived in Israel were oppressed on a daily basis. The League of Arab States called on the international community to condemn these practices. The Durban Review Conference should give a new impetus to the international community to mobilize itself in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. In order to meet its objectives, the Conference should strengthen its follow-up mechanisms. This could only be reached through dialogue and not absence.

KONSTANTINOS TARARAS, of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said the fight against racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance was at the heart of UNESCO's mandate. Its commitment was affirmed by UNESCO's role in deconstructing pseudoscientific theories of racial superiority; by its firm and unconditional stand against apartheid; and by the adoption of important normative instruments, such as the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice and the Convention against Discrimination in Education. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action gave a strong impetus for renewing UNESCO's commitment in this regard. A long process of broad consultations had led to the adoption of an Integrated Strategy to Combat Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2003.

SHAUNA OLNEY, of the International Labour Organization, said that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance were contrary to human rights and dignity. They were serious obstacles to social cohesion, peace and stability. These unacceptable practices had to be understood and addressed as both causes and consequences of exclusion and poverty. The International Labour Organization's Decent Work Agenda was based on the conviction that social justice could only become a reality when men and women, irrespective of their race, colour or creed, enjoyed equal opportunities and treatment in the world of work. Saying no to racism at the workplace was key for promoting respect, tolerance and inclusiveness. Governments had a duty to honour their international commitments. However, day-to-day action to eliminate racial discrimination was a collective responsibility. Since 2001 a great number of positive steps had been taken to bring an end to racism at work and there had been an increasing recognition that diversity meant strength rather than weakness.

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that the voice of reason that had finally lightened the path so as not to deceive the victims of racism.

LIBERE BARARUNYERETSE, of Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, said the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie supported human rights, in particular efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination, and related intolerance. The Durban Review Conference, whose task was to review progress made following the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and progress on ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, should allow the international community to reaffirm the need to fight all forms and manifestations of discrimination within an international framework and a universal dialogue. The equality gaps and contempt for human dignity meant that all were duty-bound to maintain enhanced vigilance against political demagoguery and the isolation of whole communities. The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie supported focused efforts in the field of human rights with marked commitment to fight this persistent scourge that affected the most vulnerable groups.

SUSAN TIMBERLAKE speaking on behalf of UNAIDS Executive Director MICHEL SIDIBE, said that UNAIDS wanted to highlight forms of discrimination that so far had not received the attention they deserved: discrimination based on health status and on social status. HIV-related discrimination continued to affect millions. This meant that families were destroyed, homes and jobs were lost and education was denied. It also meant that millions feared to get tested for HIV, disclose their anotproc4(hig)

existence of multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination that combined their effect with the

aspects of human nature. For the 650 million persons around the world living with di

events of the past with sincerity and had shown strong determination to solve the issues with peaceful means. He noted that through their bilateral relations, both Governments had agreed on basic principles to discuss these questions. Further, Japan had offered resident status to the Koreans living on its territory and Japan's Constitution guaranteed equality to everyone. As for the Japanese school's curriculum guidelines, the delegate underscored that it required that students should correctly understand what had led to the war and the great suffering that had resulted from it.
