

Why Democracies Against Racism Must Reject 25th Anniversary Commemoration of the Durban Conference

In 2001, one week before the September 11 terrorist attacks, the UN hosted the “[World Conference Against Racism](#)” in Durban, South Africa. Instead of combating racism, however, the conference actually incited it. Durban became the worst international manifestation of antisemitism in the post-war period – exploiting the language of universal human rights to wage a coordinated campaign to demonize and boycott the Jewish state.

Inflammatory speeches against Israel were ubiquitous. Yasser Arafat spoke of the “ugliness” of “Israeli racist policies and practices.” Cuban dictator Fidel Castro spoke of “the dreadful genocide perpetrated, at this very moment, against our Palestinian brothers.” The conference’s declaration singled out Israel alone as an alleged perpetrator of racism. As a result, the United States and Israel walked out.

Six years later, the UN Human Rights Council convened to organize the “Durban Review Conference.” The stated objective of Durban II was the review of countries’ implementation of the 2001 Durban Declaration on racism. But the true intent was to replay the 2001 propaganda assault against Israel and the West.

Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi’s representative was named Chair of the planning committee. And when the conference began in April 2009, Iranian President Ahmadinejad, a Holocaust denier, was the opening speaker. Ten countries, including the United States, Israel, Canada, and Germany, pulled out of the conference in advance.



Cuban dictator Fidel Castro with PLO chairman Yasser Arafat at the 2001 Durban Conference

In 2011, UN member states assembled again for a high level meeting to reaffirm the 2001 Durban Declaration. This time, 14 countries withdrew in advance. At the meeting, anti-Israel and anti-Western sentiment was pervasive. Once again, in 2021, the United Nations convened heads of state in New York to mark the 20th anniversary of the Durban Conference. In order not to legitimize a conference that became synonymous with hatred and antisemitism, no less than 38 countries pulled out of Durban IV.

The Bottom Line: Western States Must Put an End to Durban

- As the 25th anniversary of the Durban Conference approaches in 2026, democracies that truly believe in combating racism must continue to stand strong and oppose any commemoration of a conference forever stained by its ugly displays of hatred, racism, and antisemitism.