

Egypt (on behalf of African Group)

~~2008~~ African statement on the work of the Durban Prep-Com

Thank you Mr. President,

I have the honor to make this statement on behalf of the African Group.

We welcome the report presented by H.E. Ambassador Glaudine Mtshalli, the Permanent Representative of South Africa, on behalf of the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee of the Durban Review Conference, concerning the outcome of the Prep-Com's First Substantive Session in April and May of this year, under the able leadership of Ambassador Najat El-Hajjaji.

The African Group commends the spirit of dialogue and constructive engagement which prevailed during the Prep-Com's session, as well as that of the Working Group entrusted with reviewing contributions and negotiating the draft outcome of the Conference, chaired by the distinguished Ambassador of Armenia. In this context, we look forward to participating actively in the work of the Group of Friends constituted for this purpose.

Mr. President,

The First Substantive Session of the Preparatory Committee of the Durban Review Conference was able to arrive at a number of consensual decisions of vital importance. Among those was the decision pertaining the structure of the outcome of the Conference.

Nevertheless, the African Group deeply regrets that the venue of the Conference became an issue of contention. We deplore the fact the relevant information which would have allowed the international community to take an informed and proper decision on the matter was not made available in a timely manner. The African Group had also hoped that all countries concerned would have demonstrated the highest level of commitment towards the convening of a viable and visible Conference, rather than setting an unwelcome precedent where logistical, financial and administrative matters became pre-conditions for choosing the venue of a Conference, taking priority over the quality of the event and its outcome.

We do recognize however that with the necessary political will, all parties can make of Geneva a successful venue, by being represented at the highest political level, engaging positively in the process, and facilitating the participation of all NGOs subscribing to the objectives of the Conference.

Mr. President,

The African Group, while noting progress in the preparatory processes towards the convening of a successful Durban Review Conference, whose Substantive Outcome shall complement and reinforce the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, wishes to highlight the following concerns which must be addressed as a matter of urgency:

First: There is a necessity to identify the authority to whom the responsibility for producing the draft Outcome Document is to be allocated. The authority thus identified, would be expected to present the draft Outcome Document, based on inter alia, the outcomes of regional preparatory meetings, to the 2nd Substantive PrepCom during October 2008.

Second: There are glaring institutional weaknesses within the Unit of the Secretariat which is supposed to service the Durban Review Process effectively. The non-implementation or lack thereof in relation to a number of Prep-Com decisions attest to this. The fact that the effective participation of civil society organizations was hindered due to lack of preparation and proper communication on the part of the Secretariat is of great concern to the African Group, in addition to the lack of responsiveness to NGO initiatives to self-organize. These issues, as well as what seems to be a lack of vision on where the United Nations Anti-Racism Agenda is headed, must be addressed as a matter of necessity.

Third: There is a need to appoint an Executive Coordinator, whom among other tasks, will work with relevant UN Agencies to give visibility to the Conference and develop an outreach programme aimed at ensuring the effective mobilization of the victims of racism and the easy access of the Conference and its preparatory processes. We also envisage that the Executive Coordinator would liaise closely with the Chairperson of the Prep-Com and its Bureau in order to accelerate the process of the finalization of important issues such as the logo and slogan, which are critical marketing tools. The need to immediately establish the post of Executive Coordinator for the Durban Review Conference within OHCHR is self-evident, in view of the fact that the High Commissioner is set to leave us shortly. We deeply appreciate all the work undertaken by the High Commissioner in support of the Conference.

Fourth: The funding of the Durban Review Conference is a key element in its success. In addition to the imperative of making available all necessary resources from the regular budget of the UN, we urge every party, from all regions without exception, to contribute generously to funding this milestone event.

Mr. President,

The more difficult work towards ensuring a successful and meaningful Durban Review Conference is still ahead of us, in particular with regard to substantive issues. We owe it to the many victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to make a difference. Their legitimate struggle should not be emasculated through peripheral issues which do not fall within the purview of racial discrimination.

The outcome of the Durban Review Conference must address all the contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including those precipitated by the war on terror such as the increasing phenomenon of racial profiling and its concomitant incitement to racial, ethnic and religious hatred. First and foremost, it must afford the victims of these scourges better protection, maximum remedies and ensure the total elimination of impunity for racist acts. In this regard, we foresee the necessity for additional complementary instruments to the International Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which would fill the existing gaps and reinforce the existing protection regime.

Finally, the African Group welcomes the generous offers by the Governments of Brazil and the Federal Republic of Nigeria to host the Regional Preparatory Conferences for their respective regions, and we look forward to their concrete Substantive Outcomes, which in our view, should contribute positively to the Outcome for the Durban Review Conference.

I thank you.