

# Durban Review Conference

20 – 24 April 2009, Palais des Nations, Geneva

## Statement by the International Humanist and Ethical Union

Read by: Roy W Brown, IHEU Main Representative, UN Geneva: 24 April 2009

Thank you, Mr President

I am speaking on behalf of the International Humanist and Ethical Union with more than 100 member organisations in over 40 countries.

Mr President, the Durban Review Conference can claim some success in that the outcome document contains no toxic passages, and because some issues that have no place in human rights discourse have been eliminated. But sadly, and despite the magnificent efforts made by so many, the Conference will be seen by many more as a failure – a failure to offer hope to the hundreds of millions of our fellow humans suffering from racism every day of their lives.

On slavery, we have heard of the evils of trafficking, but not a single word of the more than one million people born into and living in chattel slavery in Africa. We have heard of the transatlantic slave trade, but not one word of the millions trafficked into slavery in North Africa, the Middle East and across the Indian Ocean – trades that persisted for over a thousand years and that left at least three people dead for every one of the tens of millions who actually reached the slave markets.

On state-sponsored racism - verging on genocide - there is not a single word about Darfur or other situations crying out for redress.

On religious hatred, we have heard only of discrimination and hatred towards Muslims, Christians and Jews, but what of the world-wide discrimination, violence and even death that awaits non-believers, sceptics, atheists, apostates and freethinkers in far too many countries, people whose only crime has been to think for themselves and to have been born in the wrong place?

Finally, Mr President, the world will want to know why the outcome document has totally ignored the most intractable form of racism on Earth, affecting more than 250 million people worldwide. I refer of course to the scourge of untouchability. How can any state here justify such blindness? I would add that IHEU will be continuing the fight for human rights with a World Conference on Untouchability to be held in London on 9 and 10 June this year.

Yes, Mr President, there has been progress, but the conference has been tainted by selectivity and bias. The international community must now move forward not only on what has been agreed here, but on what was omitted.

We urge all governments, the CERD, the High Commission, and the Human Rights Council to pick up on these neglected issues in the name of our common humanity - and of our concern for the human rights of all people.

Thank you sir.