



DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE

STATEMENT OF TAD STAHNKE

HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST

24 APRIL 2009

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

Human Rights First has encouraged all states to participate in the Durban Review Conference to ensure that it addressed the implementation of anti-racism commitments and to avoid the problems that plagued the World Conference in 2001.

The path of this conference has been uncertain, as serious disagreements stalled the negotiation of the outcome document. The conference also began on a bad note, as the deplorable remarks made by the President of Iran were precisely the sort of hatred and incitement that the Durban Review process was supposed to combat.

But the approval by consensus of the outcome document is a significant achievement by states and the High Commissioner, in that the document was greatly improved over earlier proposals.

We welcome that the outcome document affirms the importance of freedom of expression in combating racism and intolerance. Provisions on defamation of religion were dropped, and they could have led to the creation of new international norms that would have limited free speech. Yet, this step illustrates how much the international community still needs to reflect on the question of incitement to racial and religious hatred, in the context of combating racism and intolerance and protecting fundamental rights.

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We also welcome that governments eliminated language that appeared to make political action regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict an overwhelming focus of the outcome document, while not mentioning any other country-specific situations.

In addition, the outcome document, which deplores antisemitism and declares that the Holocaust must never be forgotten, stands in opposition to the statements made by the President of Iran.

But much more needs to be done. We call on states to take what was accomplished in the outcome document and advance human rights protections through the work of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly – in partnership with those states who have chosen to stay away from the Durban Review.

All states must implement measures at national and local levels to ensure that victims of racism and intolerance are protected. To name but a few urgent issues:

- ◊ Human Rights First has documented a growing wave of [hate crime violence](#), throughout Europe and North America. This violence is motivated by racism, religious intolerance, xenophobia, and homophobia to which governments have failed to respond adequately. Similar hate crime violence continues to be a serious problem in other regions of the world as well;
- ◊ Throughout the world [refugees and migrants](#) face serious violence and discrimination;
- ◊ In many states governments have implemented [national security and counter-terrorism policies](#) that fail to provide full respect for human rights; and
- ◊ [Human rights defenders](#) from across the globe are subject to violence, malicious prosecution, and other official efforts to silence and repress them.

Mr. President, as each of us leaves this conference, let us pledge to take steps on the ground to confront these and related affronts to human dignity. As we do so it will be vitally important for the United Nations and its member states to commit to an even greater international focus on this timely and important agenda in the years ahead.

Thank you.