

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Combating Racism Calls for Conviction and Determination**

Amnesty International welcomes that the Durban Review Conference Preparatory Committee was able to reach agreement on an Outcome Document for the Conference at its meeting on Friday, 17 April. The organisation would have liked to see a more action-oriented document focussing on practical measures to address racism and related forms of discrimination, but acknowledges that the agreed Outcome Document provides the foundation for a successful Review Conference.

Amnesty International is dismayed that Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Poland have decided to disengage from the Conference. The organisation also regrets that Italy and the United States have confirmed their decisions to stay outside the Review Conference.

The withdrawal of Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Poland and the refusal of Italy and the USA to join the Conference is very disappointing in light of the long and difficult negotiations and the acceptance of the revised Outcome Document on Friday. True conviction in combating racism requires governments to be there to stand up for what is right and to reject forcefully what is objectionable. While Amnesty International appreciates these countries' reaffirmation of their commitment to continue to combat racism and other forms of discrimination, their continuing engagement on the side of the victims of racism and related forms of discrimination at the Review Conference would have made that reaffirmation much more convincing.

Amnesty International encourages all governments participating in the Durban Review Conference to remain engaged and to ensure that the Conference continues to build constructively on the agreed Outcome Document. Governments committed to combating racism and a successful Review Conference must strenuously resist and respond to any renewed efforts to politicize the Conference or to detract from the over-riding objective of addressing all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia or related intolerance in all parts of the world.

#### **Background**

The Durban Review Conference meets in Geneva from 20 to 24 April 2009. The preparatory process was difficult, even by UN standards. Almost from the outset, it was marked by mutual recriminations as many countries sought to use the Conference to score political points and others showed little commitment to using the Conference to make progress in UN efforts to combat racism and related forms of discrimination. From the beginning Canada and Israel declined to participate in the preparatory meetings.

On Friday, 17 April, the Preparatory Committee for the Durban Review Conference (DRC) adopted ad referendum its report to the Conference and the draft Conference Outcome Document. The outcome document had been the subject of intense negotiations over the past six months and most recently during the three day meeting of the Preparatory Committee. Some important changes to the outcome document were made on the Friday to allow for its adoption by consensus. These included the replacement of an expression of concern about negative stereotyping of religions by an expression of concern about derogatory stereotyping and stigmatization of persons based on their religion or belief. In Amnesty International's

preliminary assessment, the outcome document adopted ad referendum of 17 April is not a good human rights document, but it is not objectionable.

Over the 18-19 April weekend, the USA announced that it would not participate in the DRC, and Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Poland announced their decisions to withdraw from the Conference. The USA had previously indicated that it would not join the DRC if the outcome document includes a reaffirmation of the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which it does. The withdrawals by the Netherlands and Italy are more difficult to understand as these countries' previously indicated "red lines" were not passed in the outcome document adopted on 17 April. These "red lines" included no reference to defamation of religion, no singling out of Israel for criticism and inclusion of an appropriate reference to the Holocaust.

Public Document

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