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The World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Durban, South Africa

“Bigotry, hatred, prejudice — these are the ugly symptoms of a sickness humanity has always and everywhere suffered. Racism can, will and must be defeated.”¹

—United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2001 as the “International Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.”² This year’s focus on racial and related intolerance, culminates with a gathering of nations at the World Conference Against Racism (The Conference) later this year. The Conference will take place in Durban, South Africa from 31 August, 2001 to 7 September, 2001 and will present an opportunity for representatives from many nations and several bodies to gather and discuss efforts to bring people in the global community closer together.

These bodies include United Nations Member States, organizations and commissions involved [the preparation of regional meetings preceding the Conference], representatives of organizations with observer-status invitations from the General Assembly, UN specialized agencies, and other bodies. In addition, representatives of UN human rights mechanisms, representatives of interested NGOs in accordance with UN Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31, and any other interested parties may send observers to attend this important event.³ One of the questions the Conference will try to address is how racism can still exist when factors such as globalization and technology continue to bring the world community closer together.

¹ Kofi Annan, *Globalization, Says Secretary-General, ‘Should Also Give Us a Humanity Free of the Barriers of Race,’* reprinted in S.G. Press Release, U.N. Doc. SG/SM/6927, RD/892 (16 March 1999).

² G.A. Resolution 84, U.N. GAOR, 55th Sess., U.N. Doc. GA/RES/55/84 (2000).

³ Participation in the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, available at <http://www.un.org/WCAR/particip.htm>.

During its Fifty-Sixth session, the Commission on Human Rights⁴ sought to reaffirm resolution 1998/26 of 17 April, 1998, which recommended that the activities of the Program of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination focus on the preparatory process for the World Conference.⁵ The Commission also took note of Resolution 54/154 of 17 December, 1999, through which the General Assembly welcomed the offer extended by the Government of South Africa to host the Conference.⁶ Durban, South Africa is a fitting choice for the World Conference since it is a culturally diverse city which in the past has been host to other important global conferences, such as the 13th International AIDS Conference.⁷

The World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance will encompass five themes:

Theme 1: Sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, and related intolerance;

Theme 2: Victims of racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance;

Theme 3: Measures of prevention, education and protection aimed at the eradication of racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance at the national, regional and international levels;

Theme 4: Provision for effective remedies, recourses, redress, (compensatory) and other measures at the national, regional and international levels; and

Theme 5: Strategies to achieve full and effective equality, including international co-operation and enhancement of the United Nations and other international mechanisms in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia.⁸

⁴ The Commission is part of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

⁵ See U.N. ESCOR, 56th Sess., U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/2000/L.13 (7 April 2000).

⁶ See *id.*

⁷ See *Durban 2001, United Against Racism*- Newsletter of the World Conference Against Racism Secretariat, Issue 1, December 2000, available at <http://www.un.org/WCAR/index.html>.

⁸ Themes From the Provision Agenda, available at <http://www.un.org/WCAR/index.html>.

In an effort to create awareness about the upcoming conference, the UN has designated the Commission on Human Rights as the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference.⁹ Two preparatory meetings were scheduled to precede the Conference. The first was held May 1st–5th, 2000 in Geneva and the second will be held in May/June 2001, also in Geneva.¹⁰ The five aforementioned themes arose from the May 2000 meeting.¹¹ At that meeting, draft rules and procedures were decided upon, as well as a voluntary fund established to provide additional resources for the preparatory process and the Conference itself.¹²

In anticipation of the upcoming conference, various participating Member States have also planned numerous meetings. These have included a European regional group meeting, a Latin America group meeting, a regional conference for the Americas, and an African regional expert group meeting, to name a few.¹³ One particularly important event was the Asia-Pacific Seminar of Experts in Preparation for the World Conference against Racism: Migrants and Trafficking in Person with Particular Reference to Women and Children held 5–7 September, 2000, in Bangkok, Thailand.¹⁴ The seminar concluded that, among other things, people of poverty migrated “within and across national borders . . . [because of] racial discrimination, internal conflicts, lack of opportunity, discrimination against women and to reunite families.”¹⁵ Moreover, trafficking remains a major concern in Asia and the Pacific, where women and children are often taken by coercion, trickery, and deceit. The seminar further noted that some issues of contemporary racism are the result of past transgressions between particular races, together with past migrations.¹⁶

⁹ See GA/RES/55/84, *supra* note 4, section II, para. 1.

¹⁰ See Calendar of Meetings, *available at* <http://www.un.org/WCAR/prepmtg.htm>.

¹¹ See Report of the Preparatory Committee on its First Session, U.N. GAOR, 54th Sess., U.N. Doc. A/CONF.189/PC.1/21 (2000).

¹² See *id.*

¹³ See Calendar of Meetings, *supra* note 10.

¹⁴ See Asia-Pacific Seminar of Experts in Preparation for the World Conference Against Racism: Migrants and Trafficking in Persons with Particular Reference to Women and Children, 5–7 September, 2000, Bangkok, Thailand, *available at* <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/racism/index.html> [hereinafter Asia-Pacific Seminar].

¹⁵ *Id.* at para. 1.

¹⁶ See *id.* at para. 3.

The Seminar issued several recommendations for addressing these problems in the Asia-Pacific region, which will hopefully be raised at the upcoming Conference on an international level.¹⁷ For example, the Seminar recommended that States ratify, without reservation, certain United Nations and International Labor Organization conventions, including:

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination;
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
- The ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised) (No. 97), 1949;
- The ILO Migrant Workers Convention (Supplementary Provisions) (No. 143), 1975 and the accompanying Migrant Workers Recommendations (No. 151), 1975; and
- The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), 1999.¹⁸

More importantly, the Seminar discussed what it termed "sensitization programmes."¹⁹

Included in these, recommendations were made aimed at police and immigration officials, civil society organizations, and individuals in order to create means to lessen the problems of racism, xenophobia, and related problems. For example, the Seminar recommended police and immigration officer training "in the application of international human rights standards such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial

¹⁷ See generally Asia-Pacific Seminar, *supra* note 14.

¹⁸ Asia-Pacific Seminar, *supra* note 14, at para. 58.

¹⁹ Asia-Pacific Seminar, *supra* note 14, at para. 70.

Discrimination,” and recommended that such training be a criteria for promotion.²⁰ Another recommendation is “human rights training, anti-racism training and dissemination” through programs such as “voluntary service for young people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds” to promote understanding between different cultures and lessen racism, xenophobia, and related problems.²¹

Recommendations such as those made at the Asia-Pacific Seminar reflect the need for wide-ranging methods of combating racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerances, ranging from the national level to the individual level. With hope, the upcoming Conference in Durban will also recognize this need and synthesize effective plans and recommendations for a continuing effort to end the proliferation of such ignorance-based problems in the global community.

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²⁰ *See id.*

²¹ Asia-Pacific Seminar, *supra* note 14, at para. 76.

