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Press Release

'NOW IS THE TIME FOR ACTION', HUMAN RIGHTS HIGH COMMISSIONER TELLS THIRD COMMITTEE, AS IT TAKES UP RACISM CONFERENCE REPORT

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Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, Cultural) that agreement on the historic, yet forward-looking, Durban Declaration and Programme of Action provided a new and innovative anti-discrimination agenda -- an essential element of an emerging global dialogue on how to eliminate the scourge of racial discrimination.

Mrs. Robinson addressed the Committee as it reconvened this morning to take up matters related to the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, which had been deferred during its substantive 2001 session. The three-day resumed session will primarily be devoted to discussion of the report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 8 September 2001, of which Mrs. Robinson served as Secretary-General. Protracted negotiations on the outcome of the Conference in Geneva had delayed the issuance of that report and, by extension, delayed the Committee's debate on racial discrimination.

Today, she urged delegations not to dwell on how difficult the process had been in Durban. Indeed, the fact that issues involved did not lend themselves to easy solutions was precisely the reason the Conference had been so important. "Now is the time for action", she said, and the credibility of the international community depended on its

living up to the commitments that had been made, not only today, but tomorrow and beyond.

She stressed that despite many difficulties, the Conference had been ultimately successful in negotiating documents which addressed a wide range of subjects. Common language had been found on difficult issues relating to slavery, the slave trade, colonialism and the Middle East. Agreement had also been on the need for national action plans, tougher national legislation and more legal assistance to victims of racial discrimination.

Of great importance, she continued, was that the Durban documents specified that a victim-oriented approach was an important tool to eliminate racial discrimination. In that regard, specific reference was made to Africans and persons of African descent, Asians and persons of Asian descent, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, minorities, the Roma and others. "We must make Durban a reality", she said, "we cannot let the victims of discrimination down at this crucial moment." The Durban documents provided the tools to implement the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

She hoped the Committee would support the establishment of an anti-discrimination unit in her Office to follow up on implementation and to ensure that the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action were mainstreamed in its activities, as well as in other United Nations bodies and specialized agencies. She also called on delegations to support the recommendation for the establishment of a group of five independent eminent experts to follow the implementation of the Durban documents in cooperation with her Office. Both those important proposals would require budgetary support.

The representative of Spain, speaking on behalf of the European Union, echoed Mrs. Robinson's sentiments, saying despite difficult circumstances the Conference had given a clear signal to the international community, and the adopted texts had been an expression of a strong political will to put an end to racism and racial discrimination in all its manifestations. States bore the responsibilities to renew efforts to combat those scourges, and the Conference had emphasized that legal frameworks had to be reinforced by adopting relevant national legislations.

While agreeing that the commitments reached at Durban represented a landmark achievement, the representative of Malawi, speaking on behalf of the South African Development Community (SADC), was concerned that the delay in the issuance of the outcome report had sent the wrong message about the seriousness and commitment of the United Nations to end the scourge of racial discrimination and related intolerance.

He added that while one of the aims of the Conference had been to send a clear message to all the peoples of the world that all governments, civil society and non-

governmental organizations had collectively condemned all forms of racism, actions and threats of walk-out by some delegations might have been interpreted as an acceptance of racism and its manifestations. The region also remained particularly concerned that the question of follow-up to the Conference had not produced the expected result -- agreement on a five-year review.

Also speaking this morning were the representatives of Senegal (on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)), Brazil, Mexico, China, Cuba, Norway and Cyprus.

In addition, this morning Bacre Ndiaye, Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered a statement on behalf of Maurice Glele-Ahanhanzo, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Measures to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The Third Committee will meet again today at 3 p.m. to continue its general discussion of matters related to racism and racial discrimination, and the report of the World Conference against Racism.

Background

The General Assembly's Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, Cultural) will reconvene this morning to take up matters related to the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, which had been deferred during its substantive 2001 session. The three-day resumed session -- six meetings, opening today, and continuing Thursday, 31 January, and Friday, 1 February -- will primarily be devoted to discussion of the report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 8 September 2001.

At the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the full report on the outcome of the World Conference against Racism -- which was still being drafted in Geneva during the Third Committee's substantive session -- was not published because of fundamental disagreement in the outcome of the Conference deliberations themselves.

In an interactive dialogue with the Committee on 6 November, Mary Robinson addressed delegations' concerns at the delay of that report and, by extension, the delay of the Committee's debate on racial discrimination. The disagreement, she said, stemmed from the placement -- not content -- of three paragraphs in the report. An agreement would no doubt be reached. But until the matter was settled, there were limitations on her Office's ability to promote the anti-discrimination agenda.

When the Committee completed the bulk of its work on 30 November 2001, negotiations on the Durban Report were still under way in Geneva. At the final meeting, delegations expressed their concern that, fully three months after the Conference's conclusion, issues surrounding its outcome remained unresolved. Reiterating the importance of addressing racism, racial discrimination and intolerance, and pledging to hold its customary debate on those issues, delegations unanimously approved a resolution --subsequently adopted by the Assembly --to hold a resumed session whenever the Durban Report was issued.

On 3 January 2002, Mrs. Robinson announced the publication of the report -- which contains the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action -- from Geneva, affirming that the anti-discrimination agenda shaped by the World Conference had now forged a "living, breathing document". "With this agenda in our hands", she continued, "we can regain the momentum created by the Conference and get down to the business of making the commitments made in Durban a reality."

The Declaration and Programme of Action included in the report (document A/CONF.189/12), commit Member States to undertake a wide range of measures to combat racism and discrimination at the international, regional and national levels. Action is urged in human rights education, employment and the establishment and reinforcement of independent specialized national institutions.

Overall, the Declaration expresses solidarity with the peoples of Africa in their continuing struggle against racism, racial discrimination, and related intolerance. It also affirms the great importance of solidarity, respect, tolerance and multiculturalism, which constitute the moral ground and inspiration for the worldwide struggle against the inhuman tragedies that have affected people throughout the world, especially in Africa, for too long.

Noting the importance of paying special attention to new manifestations of racism, discrimination and related intolerance to which youth and other vulnerable groups might be exposed, the Declaration recognizes that those evils are among the root causes of armed conflict and very often among its consequences. It expresses deep concern that socio-economic development is being hampered by widespread internal conflicts, including those arising from racism, discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and from lack of democratic, inclusive and participatory governance.

Regarding the grounds for discrimination, the report states that the Declaration recognizes that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance occur on the grounds of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origins, and that the victims can suffer multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination based on other or related grounds, including language, sex, religion, political or other opinion, social origin, property, birth or other status.

On the question of victims of racism, it notes that "the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are individuals or groups of individuals who are or who have been affected by or subjected to or targets of those scourges".

The Declaration fully recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples, consistent with the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, and, therefore, stresses the need to adopt appropriate constitutional, administrative, legislative and judicial measures, including those derived from applicable international instruments.

The Declaration also expresses concern about the plight of the Palestinian people under foreign occupation, and recognizes the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State. It also recognizes the right to security for all States in the region, including Israel, and called upon all States to support the peace process and bring it to an early conclusion.

Recalling that the Holocaust must never be forgotten, the Declaration recognizes with deep concern the increase in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, as well as the emergence of racial and violent movements based on racism and discriminatory ideas against Jewish, Muslim and Arab communities.

On the question of slavery, the Declaration acknowledges and profoundly regrets the massive human sufferings and the tragic plight of millions of men, women and children as a result of slavery, slave trade, transatlantic slave trade, apartheid, colonialism and genocide.

Acknowledging that these were appalling tragedies in human history, the Declaration further acknowledges that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade, and among the major sources and manifestations of racism and racial discrimination.

Inviting the international community to honour the memory of the victims of these tragedies, the Declaration also notes that some States have taken the initiative of regretting or expressing remorse or presenting apologies, and calls on all those who have not yet contributed to restoring the dignity of the victims to find appropriate ways to do so.

The Programme of Action included in the report discusses the sources and causes of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and calls for concrete action to eradicate them. A large part of the programme is devoted to prevention, education and protection measures at the national level. It also recommends a number of measures at the international level, including the establishment of a follow-up observatory composed of five eminent persons from the

various regions to work with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations bodies to help in implementation of the Declaration, Action Plan and other tasks.

Calling on States to accede to the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, with a view to universal ratification by 2005, the Programme urges them to promote the use of public and private investment to eradicate poverty in areas predominantly inhabited by victims of discrimination.

The Programme further urges States to implement policies and measures designed to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the basis of religion or belief that many people of African descent experience. It further calls on States to ensure full and effective access to the justice system for all individuals, particularly those of African descent.

States are also urged to adopt or continue to apply all necessary measures to promote, protect and ensure the enjoyment by indigenous people of their rights; to facilitate family reunification, which has a positive effect on integration of migrants; and to take all possible measures to promote the full enjoyment by all migrants of all human rights. The document further encourages States to develop strategies to address discrimination against refugees; and to end impunity and prosecute those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including crimes related to sexual and other gender-based violence against women and girls.

Among other things, States are encouraged to develop or implement effective legislation and other measures to protect migrant workers, with special attention to people engaged in domestic work and trafficked persons; to ensure accountability for misconduct by law enforcement personnel motivated by racism; to eliminate racial profiling; and to protect the privacy of genetic information.

The Programme of Action further urges States to prohibit discriminatory treatment against foreigners and migrant workers; to enact laws against trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and to compile and publish reliable statistical data to assess the situation of individuals and groups who are victims of discrimination.

The remainder of the report contains general information on the convening of the Conference, including its location and list of participants. It also includes highlights of the Conference's general debate, as well as reports of the Conference's negotiating bodies: the Main Committee, the drafting Committee and the Credentials Committee. It also contains a chapter on the adoption of the Conference's final document and the report of the Conference.

Other reports and letters before the Committee on matters related to racial discrimination include the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial

Discrimination and a note on the work of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism.

The Committee was expected to consider the Secretary-General's report on the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (document A/56/481). That report notes that five regional expert meetings had been held as part of the preparatory process for the Conference. It also highlights the participation of NGOs in the work of the Conference.

According to the report, the Conference adopted a Declaration and Programme of Action that committed Member States to undertake a wide range of measures to combat racism and discrimination at the international, regional and national levels. However, a number of delegations had made known their reservations or disassociations on certain issues. The report states that at the Conference's conclusion, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, who also served as Secretary-General of the Conference, said Durban must be a beginning not an end, and that there must be follow-up. Now the international community had a framework for action that would serve as a blueprint for all nations to promote tolerance and protect all from racism and discrimination.

The report concludes that the most important event during the past eight years of the Third Decade was the Durban Conference. The final report of the Conference should show the path for the remaining two years of the Decade, as well as any future action in the struggle against racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance. To ensure that the recommendations in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action result in concrete achievements and improvements, the full support of all actors is needed.

The Committee also had before it a note by the Secretariat --the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (document A/56/228), which the General Assembly requested be submitted to its fifty-sixth session. It states that the Special Rapporteur will present only an oral report on his activities since the last Assembly session, and submit a comprehensive report to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-eighth session, in March 2002.

Another document before the Committee is the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (document A/56/18), which highlights the work of that Committee during the past year. The report notes the preparations for the Durban Conference, including regional preparatory meetings.

According to the report, last year the Committee continued its significant workload, examining over 20 reports of States parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which has now been ratified by

158 States. At present, only 34 parties have made the optional declaration recognizing the Committee's competence to receive communications under article 14 of the Convention. As a result, the individual communications procedure is under-utilized, as is also the inter-State complaints procedure. [The report was drafted before the convening of the World Conference against Racism.]

Letters for the Secretary-General before the Committee included one dated 8 May from the Permanent Representative of Israel (document A/56/71-E/2001/65); another from Israel dated 18 May (document A/56/79); one dated 14 June from Syria (document A/56/94); and one from the Permanent Representative of Qatar (document A/56/462-S/2001/962).

Opening Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

MARY ROBINSON, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Secretary-General of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, had helped focus the international community's thinking concerning areas where action had been insufficient and where more could be done to create just and fair societies free of racial discrimination. Most knew that the Conference had involved nine days of intensive and frequently difficult negotiations.

Even after the Conference had ended, there were differing views that principally concerned the placement of several paragraphs in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and which had delayed the issuance of the report of the Conference. She said that despite all those obstacles, the Conference had been ultimately successful in negotiating a Declaration and Action Plan by consensus. Those documents addressed a wide range of subjects. Common language had been found on difficult issues relating to slavery, the slave trade, colonialism and the Middle East.

She said that agreement had also reached on the need for national action plans, tougher national legislation and more legal assistance to victims of racial discrimination. Improvement in the administration of justice and the reinforcement of national institutions to combat racial discrimination were also emphasized. In that regard, the importance of appropriate remedies and positive action for victims of racial discrimination was underlined.

Highlighting other elements adopted, she said that a wide variety of educational and awareness-raising measures had been emphasized. Measures were also included to ensure equality in the fields of employment, health and the environment. Measures to counter racism in the media and through the use of new technologies such as the Internet were also included in the documents adopted.

The Durban documents also specified that a victim-oriented approach was an important tool to eliminate racial discrimination, she added. In that regard, specific reference had been made to Africans and persons of African descent, Asians and persons of Asian descent, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, the Roma and others. It was important to note that the Conference documents were both historic and forward-looking. They provided a new and innovative anti-discrimination agenda and, as such, constituted an essential element of an emerging global dialogue on how to eliminate the scourge of racial discrimination.

The Durban texts had become all the more important following the horrific terrorist attacks on New York last September, she continued. The documents presented a vision of the world which embraced diversity and stood for equality --they were an antidote for terrorism. The real issue today, then, was not to dwell on how difficult the process in Durban had been; the real question now was the credibility of the international community in living up to the commitments that had been made.

Now was the time for action, she said. Now was the time for implementation. People throughout the world continued to suffer daily from racism and racial discrimination, and she was sure that those people were hoping that the United Nations and its Member States would lead the way forward and help them achieve a better life free from discrimination. "We must make Durban a reality", she said, "we cannot let the victims of discrimination down at this crucial moment." The World Conference documents gave delegations the tools to implement the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

She added that she hoped the Committee would support the establishment of an anti-discrimination unit in her Office to follow up on implementation. That unit would focus on, among other things, mainstreaming the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action in the activities of the Office, as well as in other United Nations bodies and specialized agencies.

In addition, she said the unit would provide input on technical assistance programmes designed to fight racial discrimination, including the development of national action plans. That unit would also organize seminars, both in Geneva and on a regional basis, and establish databases on best practices and relevant national legislation. Her Office had laid the groundwork to ensure that it would operate on an interim basis, but budgetary support was required to ensure its long-term functioning.

She said the Programme of Action also had recommended the establishment of a group of five independent eminent experts, appointed by the Secretary-General, on the recommendation of the chairperson of the Commission of Human Rights. The purpose of that body would be to follow the implementation of the Durban documents in cooperation with Mrs. Robinson's Office. That proposal would also require budgetary

support.

Statements

BACRE NDIAYE, Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered a statement on behalf of Maurice Glele-Ahanhanzo, Special Rapporteur on Measures to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Mr. Ndiaye said the clamour had died and the spotlight had been turned off, but the discussions and achievements at the Durban Conference would continue to challenge and enlighten the international community for years to come. In Durban, the global community had been able to reconcile many difficult issues. Most importantly, it had been able to highlight the central significance of the principle of respect as the ideal to be promoted throughout the United Nations system and the wider international community.

According to Mr. Ndiaye, Mr. Glele-Ahanhanzo's work had most recently focused on the resurgence of racist violence through the Internet, police forces, extremist groups and the administration of justice. He appreciated that many of those issues had been emphasized by the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action.

He went on to say that priority had been devoted to the convening of the Conference, and his work in that regard would be presented in March to the Commission on Human Rights. He said that Mr. Glele-Ahanhanzo had visited Australia to investigate policies in that country which might possibly have discriminated against the Aboriginal people. The Rapporteur's planned mission to Canada had been deferred until later this year.

INNOCENCIO F. ARIAS (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Cyprus, Malta, Turkey and Iceland, said States bore the responsibilities to renew efforts to combat racism and racial discrimination. Despite difficult circumstances, the Conference had given a clear signal to the international community.

The adopted texts had been an expression of a strong political will to put an end to the phenomena of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance in all its manifestations, he said. The Conference had made it possible to think more about the origins and contemporary forms of those phenomena. The European Union had recognized and condemned the immense suffering caused by past and contemporary forms of slavery and the slave trade, as well as of colonialism. The time had come to be forward-looking and to implement the commitments adopted in Durban. A new relationship based on mutual respect and solidarity had to be constructed.

The Conference had emphasized that the legal framework to combat those phenomena had to be reinforced by adopting relevant national legislations. Ways and means for judicial resources had to be established in that regard, giving individuals legal access to recourse. Education, training and prevention should be improved, as well as the development of information about the phenomena. Steps must be taken to control forms of dissemination new racist ideas, such as those on the Internet, in particular, regarding anti-Semitism. Follow-up to the Conference was essential. Racism and racial discrimination were threats to democratic values and ran counter to the principles of the European Union. The struggle against racism was an essential element in the policies of the European Union and its States. The establishment of the European observer for racism and xenophobia had been an important step.

The European Union had supported work in regional organizations such as the Council of Europe, he said. The legal system of the European Tribunal of Human Rights provided effective protection for human rights. The European Union was involved in efforts to prevent violent conflict by promoting inter-ethnic relations and tolerance. Ethnic discrimination was a guarantee for intolerance and instability. The European Union was convinced that any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour or national or ethnic origin, was a denial of human rights. The principle of non-discrimination was vital for human dignity.

PAPA LUIS FALL (Senegal), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Mauritania, said the countries in his region understood the critical importance of the documents before the Committee and the ultimate success of the Durban Conference. It was true that the West African States had suffered and continued to suffer disastrous effects of the transatlantic slave trade. It was on that basis that the region had taken an active interest in the preparations for and outcome of the Durban Conference.

He said the Conference had marked a turning point in the international community's efforts to address the important issues of racial discrimination and intolerance. His delegation was committed to supporting the Durban documents and believed that society at all levels should be mobilized to combat all forms of discrimination. The West African States were particularly gratified that the Durban documents emphasized that comprehending historic truth was essential to setting a broad new anti-discrimination agenda. He was also gratified that the slave trade had been identified as a crime against humanity, of which Africans and persons of African descent had been victims.

He went on to reiterate the importance of the media education, women and youth organizations and other civil society actors in the fight against racism. That struggle must not only be the priority of governments, it must involve the private sector. Durban had laid the groundwork for a new world strategy against racism and racial

discrimination. The international community must keep up the momentum gained in Durban to ensure that the difficult consensus reached there was respected and implemented. In that regard, he called for the rapid establishment of an anti-discrimination unit in the Office of the High Commissioner. He also called for a year to recognize the issue of trafficking in persons, particularly women and children. He also hoped work would continue on the elaboration of an international convention protecting the rights of disabled persons.

ISAAC C. LAMBA (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said as a region the SADC had suffered from the effects of discrimination that underlay the phenomenon of colonialism and the worst form of institutionalized racism, namely, apartheid. Many countries of the world had joined SADC countries in the fight and eventual defeat of apartheid. With that achievement, it should not be difficult for the international community to combat the scourges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Durban Conference had been a landmark conference. For the first time in history, the international community had declared slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity.

The region remained concerned that the follow-up to the Conference had not produced the expected result, he said. He regretted that the Conference had not agreed on a five-year review. The fight against racism and racial discrimination should receive the same priority attention as the fight against terrorism. One of the aims of the Conference was to send a clear message to all the peoples of the world that all governments, civil society and NGOs had collectively condemned all forms of racism. The SADC remained concerned by the actions and threats by some delegations of walking out. Such actions and threats might have been interpreted as an acceptance of racism and its manifestations.

The SADC deeply regretted the delay in the issuance of the outcome report of the Conference, he said. That delay had sent the wrong message about the seriousness and commitment of the United Nations to end the scourge of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

GELSON FONSECA, JR. (Brazil) said the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted in Durban by consensus was a landmark in the fight against racial discrimination. It had recognized that slavery and slave trade constituted a crime against humanity and should always have done so. The suffering due to colonialism and its links to racism had also been acknowledged, and the international community had regretted that the effects and persistence of colonialist practices had been factors contributing to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world.

He said much progress had been made concerning the recognition of specific groups

of victims of racism. Attention had been drawn to the suffering that Africans and people of African descent faced all over the world. Indigenous issues had also been given due consideration, and the integration of a gender perspective and the respect for the rights of the child had been emphasized as cross-cutting issues, relating to all groups of victims. Another breakthrough had been the attention paid to those who were victims of multiple forms of discrimination.

Many of the plagues that haunted humanity nowadays had their roots in intolerance, he said. One had to be generous in order not to see the differences of others as a threat to one's own way of life. One had to learn to value difference. The recognition of human differences was the precondition to accepting the universality of human rights. He hoped for a full endorsement of the Durban outcome by the General Assembly in the current session. In that regard, focus should be on the practical recommendations covering a wide range of areas. Those concrete recommendations, rather than the over-politicized debates, should guide the efforts at the United Nations. The interests of the victims must come first, so that the objective of protecting human beings from discrimination of any sort could be achieved worldwide.

XOCHITL GALVEZ RUIZ, Head of The Presidential Office for Indigenous Population of Mexico, said the Declaration and the Programme of Action had invited States to contribute to enabling the dignity of victims of exclusion and discrimination under various forms of colonialism, slavery and slave trade. Repairing that damage must be the basis for national policies. One of the results of the Conference was that the General Assembly had decided to establish a preparatory committee to prepare an international convention regarding disabled people. Proceedings in the Conference had highlighted the fact that discrimination against women should be tackled.

As a country of migrants, Mexico had supported respect for the human rights of all individuals on its territory, despite their migrant status, she said. The Conference had emphasized that migrants were not a problem, but a component of reality, contributing towards the richness of culture of the receiving countries. That had constituted a step forward. Regarding the demands of indigenous peoples, progress had been made, but there were still outstanding issues.

The Conference had acknowledged and granted the status of "peoples" to indigenous peoples. She appealed to Member States to conclude negotiations on a text for a universal declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples. The presence of indigenous peoples on various continents must be acknowledged. Mexico had undertaken efforts to eradicate discriminatory practices by, among other things, adopting relevant articles in its Constitution. Today, the essential problem of the community of nations was not diversity, but rather poverty, inequality and intolerance, she said.

XIE BOHUA (China) said racism was one of the grossest violations of human rights.

During the Conference, delegates had presented many important ideas on strategies and measures to eliminate racism, and the international community was now faced with the important task of finding ways and means to implement the outcome. Nations of the world should demonstrate their political will to seize the opportunity offered by the Conference and commit themselves to an unstinting fight against all forms of racism, the complete elimination of the root causes of old and new manifestations of racism, and the establishment of a new international political and economic order which was just and equitable.

The General Assembly and other relevant bodies should take effective follow-up measures, so that the positive outcome of the Conference could be translated into truly concrete action against racism. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights assumed an important function of coordinating international efforts to combat racism. He hoped that the Office would consult broadly when it formulated its work programme in that regard, and equip it with adequate human, material and financial resources to bring about constant progress in the fight against racism.

Colonialism, foreign occupation, the slave trade and apartheid were typical manifestations of racism that had wreaked havoc in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. He called on those countries that had subjected other countries to aggression, colonial rule or enslavement in the past to face up to historical reality, learn from past mistakes and take effective measures to help developing countries to overcome, as soon as possible, economic backwardness and the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

LUIS ALBERTO AMORÓS NÚÑEZ (Cuba) said that the satisfactory conclusion of the Durban Conference was a signal to global actors. By an overwhelming majority, the international community had there decided on the world's agenda to ensure equality and respect for diversity on the basis of human rights. He hoped that the Assembly would be able to endorse the Declaration and Plan of Action so that the immediate implementation of their principles could be ensured.

It was important to guarantee that the decisions reached at the Durban Conference be given equal weight with the outcomes of other United Nations conferences that had taken place over the past decade. He hoped that all would work with dignity to make the words in the documents become a reality. He noted that the Conference had reached a decision on the historic past, identifying the transatlantic slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity. It was also noteworthy that the lingering effects of colonialism on modern societies had been emphasized.

He said that it was nevertheless important to ensure that unique circumstances of those identified in the Durban documents as victims of racism continue to be addressed. The Conference had provided a detailed survey of current situation of racism, and in many

parts of the world notions of cultural and racial superiority continued to flourish. It would be most important to ensure that all relevant agencies and funds were focused on addressing the issues of racism, particularly through the implementation of all relevant international conventions and human rights norms.

OLE PETER KOLBY (Norway) said efforts to combat racism should focus particularly on education and awareness-raising and on strengthening legal frameworks for combating racism at the national level. Governments should, in partnership with civil society, be encouraged to draw up national strategies or plans of action that included mainstreaming the fight against racism in national policies and programmes. His Government was currently drawing up a new national plan of action to combat racism and discrimination. Governments must create conditions to enable people belonging to vulnerable groups, including migrants.

The root causes of social exclusion and marginalization needed to be addressed, he said. Particular attention should be paid to the victims of multiple forms of discrimination and a gender perspective should be integrated into policies and programmes that combated racism. Lack of democracy and the violation of human rights were important sources of discrimination and intolerance. Racism and racial discrimination were in themselves serious violations of human rights. The follow-up to the Conference provided a unique opportunity for the world community to commit itself to a truly global effort to address that evil in all its manifestations.

The fight against poverty and the fight for equality of opportunity were fundamental to the elimination of racism, he said. Poverty eradication, respect for human rights and equal rights for all were, therefore, crucial elements in any strategy to achieve equality of opportunity and implement effective measures to combat racism. Promoting diversity and tolerance were challenges for every government, for all societies and for every individual. No country could claim to be free from intolerance. The momentum from Durban should give direction and fresh impetus to the fight against all forms of racism and intolerance.

DEMETRIS HADJIARGYROU (Cyprus) said in a world populated by more than six billion people and characterized by increased globalization and migration -- legal and illegal -- the dangers posed to societies by intolerance of any kind must not be underestimated. It was, therefore, imperative that the international community address seriously the issue with determination and perseverance. Universal ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination should be made a top priority.

In its efforts to reach full conformity with that Convention, Cyprus had reviewed and amended the legal framework on the protection of refugees and displaced persons regardless of ethnic origin, as well as the procedure for acquiring Cypriot citizenship,

among other things. In the field of education, his country had paid special attention to the education programmes of children belonging to minorities such as Latin, Maronite and Armenian students. It fully covered the fees and expenses of Turkish Cypriot students who resided in the Government-controlled area, he said.

Cyprus was still coping with the tragic effects of the Turkish invasion in 1974 and the grave consequences of ethnic cleansing that had been witnessed with the expulsion of Greek-Cypriot inhabitants from the occupied area. Due to the policies of the occupying Power, his Government was prevented from enforcing provisions of the earlier mentioned Convention in the entire country, a fact that had been underlined by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its report of 10 August 2001. He hoped that the direct talks begun earlier this month between President Clerides and the Turkish Cypriot leader Mr. Denktash would lead to an early agreement, on the basis of Security Council resolutions, that would allow all Cypriots to live in a reunited, democratic and prosperous Cyprus -- member of the European Union -- with their fundamental freedoms and human rights fully protected.

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