



Briefing note

The Durban Review Conference against Racism: The World Conference against Racism 7 years on

In 2006 the United Nations General Assembly decided in [resolution 61/149](#) to review the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) which was held in Durban, South Africa from 31 August 2001 to 7 September 2001. The Durban Review Conference against Racism will take place from 20 to 24 April 2009 in Geneva. Two Preparatory Conferences have been organised to determine the objectives of the Durban Review Conference.

Important dates:

World Conference against Racism	31 August - 7 September 2001
Durban Review Conference against Racism	20 - 24 April 2009

What are the goals of the Review Conference?

The Review Conference aims to review and evaluate the implementation of the WCAR Declaration and Programme of Action at international, national and local level. This includes an assessment of current manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia and related issues. In addition, the Conference is to assess the effectiveness of mechanisms to tackle racism and related intolerance; to encourage the universal ratification and implementation of the International

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and, to identify good practices in the struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance and related discussions.

What were the goals of the WCAR?

The UN has been concerned about racism since its creation and therefore has dedicated three decades to the fight against racism from 1973 to 2003. The last World Conference in 2001 was to evaluate the existing mechanisms to combat racism and racial discrimination as

well as to make recommendations encouraging further action.

What were the outcomes of WCAR?

After three Preparatory Conferences, the World Conference against Racism took place from 31 August to 7 September 2001 in Durban, South Africa. Two documents had been drafted that were adopted by the general assembly during the WCAR: the Declaration and the Programme of Action. Click here for the [official Declaration](#) and the Programme of Action. These documents, whilst acknowledging concerning issues regarding racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other intolerances, were divided in four parts:

- General issues
- Identification of sources of racism, which included colonialism and an acknowledgement that “[...] *slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so* [...]” (Declaration art. 13)
- Victims of racism, including indigenous peoples, peoples of African descent, and also religious communities, immigrants or children.
- Measures and strategies for protection against racism and to eliminate racism and promote equality.

NGOs at the WCAR

Parallel to the WCAR an NGO forum was held from the 28 August to 1 September 2001, which brought together some 10,000 representatives of NGOs concerned with combating racism from around the world. The purpose of the NGO forum was to adopt an NGO Declaration and Programme of Action which could be used to lobby the national delegations.

What happened after the WCAR in terms of follow-up action?

At an international level, follow-up action was to be monitored by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights which created an Anti-Discrimination Unit. The main task of the unit was to liaise with NGOs which in their turn were to encourage the implementation of anti-racism strategies.

Nationally, as outlined in the Programme of Action, national governments were to adopt and implement National Action Plans (NPAR) to address issues surrounding racism thereby increasingly ensuring the elimination of racism in their countries.

The ENAR website highlights the current national action plans by country in the European Union, which can be found [here](#).

To what extent was NPAR effective?

In order to be effective, anti-racism measures need to be reviewed and evaluated to determine their success or failure. In the EU these measures however have not been implemented across the board. On the contrary: while some countries have adopted progressive policies to ensure equal treatment, others have not yet designed measures to address racism. Additionally it is important to note that in most European countries measures against racism have been made part of other new legislation.

Further, implementation is hindered by a lack of resources for the steering groups which are to oversee implementation. Only in Ireland and Latvia separate resources have been made available for the NPARs. Lack of clarity and usage of vague language has also obstructed the implementation process. Overall the effectiveness of NPAR is difficult to determine as in the EU only Sweden, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Finland have reviewed their National Action Plans.

Why a review conference?

The Durban Review Conference, which is taking place from 20-24 April 2009 in Geneva, aims to review and evaluate the Declaration and the Programme of Action adopted at the WCAR in 2001. The UK more specifically is in favour of this review conference as

it is regarded as an important contribution in the fight against racism.

What happened during the first PrepCom leading up to the Conference?

The Review Conference is preceded by two Preparatory Committees (PrepComs) conducted by the UN Commission of Human Rights. The first took place from 24 to 30 April 2008 and the second was held from 6 to 17 October 2008. The first session of the PrepCom witnessed discussion regarding the accreditation of NGOs, wanting to participate in the Durban Review Conference. This raised some concerns by the NGO community about the inclusiveness of civil society in the review process and was reflected by the fact that considerably fewer NGOs were present at the first PrepCom compared to the number attending the WCAR.

The PrepCom also saw the creation of working groups discussing different parts of the WCAR, such as the implementation of the Declaration and the Programme of Action. The [Working Group of Experts of People from African Descent](#) assessed both the progress made since Durban and areas which still need attention. The special rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Doudou Diène, expressed concern about the

decreased motivation within governments to combat racism, a revival of racism in wider society especially against religious groups but also a resistance to diversity and a multicultural society. At a political level, the special rapporteur was concerned about the spread of xenophobic discourses among certain political groups and that they are allowed to form alliances with democratic parties. The report can be found [here](#).

Regional preparatory meetings

So far two regional meetings have taken place to prepare for the Review Conference. The first for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Brasilia, Brazil from 17 to 19 June 2008. That regional meeting has concluded that states have made progress in the formulation of National Action Plans, and the adoption of policies addressing discrimination, inequality and intolerance. However, the implementation appears to remain limited. The meeting therefore acknowledges the need for further policies addressing racism and their implementation. For the final document adopted at the Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean, click [here](#).

The second Regional Preparatory Meeting took place in Abuja, Nigeria from 24 to 26 August 2008. The final document, which can be obtained from the [OHCHR website](#)

emphasises the importance of anti-discrimination action and calls upon states to adopt policies which address all forms of discrimination.

NGOs and the preparatory process

The second PrepCom which met from 6-17 October 2008 in Geneva has allowed some time for NGOs to speak during some of the plenary sessions of the PrepCom. Some NGOs have used this opportunity to make statements while others preferred creating an NGO forum to make a common statement. On Monday October 6 the Chair of the Plenary Meeting has met with representatives from various NGOs.

The sixth session of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on the implementation of the WCAR Declaration and Programme of Action will be held from 3-7 November 2008 in Geneva. The IWG was created to follow up on the PrepCom and to review all contributions made during the PrepCom meetings as well as to start negotiations on the draft of the PrepCom's outcome document. The IWG then reports to the PrepCom on its progress. NGOs which are accredited at the UN and/or those with a consultative status with the Economic and Social Council are invited to attend the meetings. Other interested NGOs are also welcome to attend.

Attending the IWG sessions

To attend the sessions of Intergovernmental Working Group (3-7 November 2008) on the implementation of the WCAR Declaration and Programme, interested NGOs must send a fax on letterhead with the names of their representatives to +41 22 928 90 50.

What happened during PrepCom 2?

The objective of the second PrepCom was to start the reviewing process of the Durban Declaration and the Programme of Action by discussing the objectives of the Durban Review Conference. During the first week of the PrepCom a decision had to be taken on the speaking time of NGOs during the plenary sessions. During the second week an agreement was reached and NGOs were allowed to express their point of view. However, as not all the objectives have entirely been discussed and negotiations have not yet been concluded, a third PrepCom will be organised from the 15 to 17 April 2009. Two international working group sessions will be organised to finish negotiations. The first IWG is to meet from 19 to 23 January 2009, the second from 6 to 9 April 2009.

What are the main challenges for the Review Conference?

NGOs present at the first Durban Review Conference PrepCom have expressed concern about a reopening of negotiations on issues which were already discussed during the WCAR thereby potentially missing its goals. National positions and the UK's more specifically, have not been fixed yet as negotiations are still being held.

Quotes from NGOs

"The Review Conference should begin by reaffirming the importance of the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. All states participating should ratify the Convention if they have not already done so, make the declaration under Article 14 of the Convention providing for communications by individuals to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), withdraw any restrictive reservation to the Convention, and cooperate fully with CERD, including submitting any overdue report." - [Human Rights Watch position paper on the Durban Preparatory Committee](#)

"Amnesty International is calling on all governments to implement national action plans to combat racism and to include specific measures relating to the administration of justice". - [Amnesty International report on the WCAR](#) *Successes must not be overshadowed by disputes*

List of acronyms

CERD	-	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
DRC	-	Durban Review Conference
EU	-	European Union
ENAR	-	European Network against Racism
IWG	-	Intergovernmental Working Group
NGO	-	Non-governmental organisation
NPAR	-	National Programme of Action against Racism
OHCHR	-	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PrepCom	-	Preparatory Committee
UK	-	United Kingdom
UN	-	United Nations
WCAR	-	World Conference against Racism

Useful links

[OHCHR Durban Review Conference](#)

[Preparatory Committee for the Review Conference](#)

[World Conference against Racism](#)

[WCAR Declaration](#)

[Human Rights Watch](#)

[ENAR fact sheet 'Durban's legacy'](#)