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## **The U.N.'s Anti-Antiracism Conference**

Geneva shows that the best hope for restoring human rights is to deny these corrupt events the veneer of legitimacy.

By GERALD M. STEINBERG

GENEVA -- Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tirade Monday to the United Nations'

"antiracism" conference should not have surprised anyone. The Iranian president denounced Israel, or the "Zionist entity" as he calls it, which, according to his version of history, was created by Europe and the U.S. on the "pretext of Jewish suffering" in World War II. He spoke of a world-wide Zionist conspiracy, referring to Israelis as "those racist perpetrators of genocide."

Many people walked out, including those European diplomats whose governments had ignored the warning signs and chosen to participate in this conference. They were cheered by Jewish NGO members and students who had come to ensure that this conference would not take the anti-Semitic path of the 2001 Durban catastrophe.

In a packed unofficial session on anti-Semitism the next day, Holocaust survivor and memorializer Elie Wiesel demanded an apology from the U.N. for even inviting Mr. Ahmadinejad, who has long been infamous for his Holocaust denial and calls for the destruction of the Jewish state.

Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz spoke of the Iran-Hamas link and attacks against Israel in the Arab world and by the left in the West. And ex-gulag resident Natan Sharansky condemned the Orwellian spectacle of an antiracism conference run by some of the world's worst human-rights violators, an absurdity that reminded him of Soviet show trials.

Consider that Libya and Iran were the leading organizers of this conference and thus responsible for drafting declarations that single out Israel among the nations for condemnation -- the modern form of anti-Semitism.

After Mr. Ahmadinejad's address, the conference got down to business:

The Syrian, Qatari and Palestinian representatives spoke of Israel's "racism," though the status of minorities and women in their own jurisdictions was off-limits, of course. Other Arab speakers focused on what they consider to be the worst form of racism: insults to Islam and the prophet Muhammad. Muslim countries have long been pushing for international laws to criminalize such "insults." Draft declarations of the Geneva conference called for limits to freedom of speech with respect to religion, i.e. Islam. Little wonder then that 10 democratic countries -- first Canada, followed by Israel, the United States, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic -- chose to stay away from this farce.

The Geneva conference has so far not seen the type of anti-Semitic excesses as witnessed in Durban, where Jews were physically attacked and Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was handed out.

But the radical agendas of many powerful NGOs is at display at numerous "side events." A London-based group called "Islamic Human Rights Commission" brought three Hasidic Jews to hold signs proclaiming "Zionism is racism." The organization "North-South 21,"

which is closely linked to the Libyan regime, organized a session on "Occupation and Discrimination," featuring Ramsey Clark, a former U.S. attorney general and now left-wing activist who accuses Israel of "genocide." Radical pro-Palestinian groups such as Badil and Ittajah held an "Israel Review Conference," which discussed how to press war-crime charges against Israelis in Western courts and cut off Western arms sales to the Jewish state. Unlike in 2001, the more prominent NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International did not take part at these sessions, even though they are playing a central role in international campaigns to delegitimize Israel.

Once again, the obsessive focus on the Jewish state meant that the real problems of racism and genocide were largely ignored at this U.N. conference. Only outside the official U.N. antiracism conference, at well-attended "counterconferences" organized by NGOs such as U.N. Watch, did the real victims of racism and mass murder get the attention they deserved.

Only at those counterconferences could one witness moving presentations by victims of Iranian oppression, survivors of the Rwandan genocide and the continuing slaughter in Darfur. And on Monday night, when Jews marked Holocaust Memorial Day, a large gathering stood quietly honoring the victims while the language of human rights was being abused in the U.N. building.

Human Rights Watch, which played an active role in the 2001 fiasco, had tried hard to pressure the Obama administration to abandon core moral principles and participate in the review conference. President Obama rejected this advice, and in a tacit rebuke to the NGO lobby explained that the foundations of the Durban process are fundamentally incompatible with universal human-rights norms. A new structure is necessary if these values are to be given serious attention.

At the same time, though, President Obama has sought to placate the NGO lobby by agreeing to rejoin the failed U.N. Human Rights Council.

The main lesson from this week's events is that the best hope for restoring human rights is to deny such corrupt organizations the veneer of legitimacy.

Mr. Steinberg is executive director of NGO Monitor and chair of the Political Science Department at Bar Ilan University.